Universidade de Lisboa

Faculdade de Letras

The Search for Identity and the Construction of an Idea of India in the novels *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy and *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai

Margarida Pereira Martins

Orientadora: Profª Doutora Luísa Maria Rodrigues Flora

Tese especialmente elaborada para a obtenção de grau de doutor em Estudos de Literatura e Cultura, especialidade em Literatura e Cultura de Expressão Inglesa.

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English Abstract

The main objective of this research project is to analyse how the novels *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) by Kiran Desai can help readers and scholars construct an idea of India and of the Indian cultural identity.

In order to develop this theory it is necessary to look into three aspects which are crucial to the building of knowledge on a nation, its culture and people and these are, national history, identity and cultural representation through different artistic production, including fictional narratives. Historical processes are the key to the unfolding of present circumstances and fundamental to the construction of a national identity that makes sense collectively. However, the perceptions of the past change according to philosophical and ideological trends, placing historical objectivity in the hands of its subjective counterpart. It is cultural theory and how it evolves in simultaneity with the world and its social, political, economic and technological development that in effect dictates the forms and expressions that give shape to societies, nations and identities.

The function of narrative whether as text, visual arts, film, architecture, dance and other creative expressions of the self, is to tell a story. And every moment of every living being can be told in a story. History too is a story and though in the past it focused mostly on the grand deeds of the European nations, with postcolonialism new stories began to emerge, revealing a world of diversity and deconstructing traditional views of the shaping of the past and the power relations involved. However, this new approach to the historical, cultural and political dialectic was achieved through the effect of the postcolonial narrative which used Western forms and structures, such as the novel and the English language, to achieve its aim. This appropriation of language and form resulted in an inversion of power relations as a cultural metaphor.

For the purpose of such a debate, the present dissertation focuses on the two novels by Roy and Desai and is divided into three main sections each of which deals with one approach to the thesis. The first chapter contains the historical approach, in the second I discuss postcolonial theory and the third analyses the relation between anthropology and fiction.

Keywords: India, postcolonialism, cultural studies, identity, literature.

Portuguese Abstract

O objectivo principal deste projecto é de analisar como através dos romances *The God of Small Things* (1997) de Arundhati Roy e *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) de Kiran Desai é possível construir uma ideia da Índia e da identidade cultural Indiana.

O desenvolvimento desta teoria implica a análise e o estudo de três aspectos fundamentais para o conhecimento mais aprofundado de uma nação, a sua cultura, e as suas pessoas. São estes a história nacional, a identidade e a sua representação cultural através da produção artística, da qual as narrativas fazem parte. Os processos históricos são primordiais como chave para o desenrolar das circunstâncias presentes e fundamentais para a construção de uma identidade nacional com um sentido do colectivo. No entanto, percepções do passado mudam consoante as tendências filosóficas e ideológicas que as nações atravessam, colocando a objetividade histórica à mercê da sua contraparte subjectiva. Portanto, é a evolução da teoria cultural em sintonia com o desenvolvimento social, político, económico e tecnológico do mundo que determina as formas e expressões que definem as sociedades, as nações e as identidades.

A função da narrativa enquanto texto, artes visuais, filme, arquitectura, dança ou outra manifestação cultural criativa, é o contar de uma história. A disciplina de história também conta uma *história*. E embora no passado a história ocidental focasse principalmente os grandes acontecimentos das nações Europeias, com o pós-colonialismo novas *histórias* surgiram revelando a importância de um mundo de diversidade, servindo para desconstruir visões estáticas da história e das relações de poder. Esta nova abordagem à dialética histórica, cultural e política foi conseguida através do efeito das narrativas pós-coloniais que fizeram uso de formas e estruturas ocidentais como o romance e a língua inglesa para atingir os seus objectivos e alcançar um público mais amplo. A apropriação da língua e da forma resultou numa inversão de poderes transformando-a em metáfora cultural.

Este debate foca-se nos dois romances de Roy e Desai e está repartido por três secções principais, onde em cada uma é desenvolvido um dos ângulos de abordagem desta tese. O primeiro capítulo contém uma abordagem histórica, o segundo é uma discussão da teoria pós-colonial e no terceiro é analisada a relação entre a antropologia e a ficção.

Palavras-chave: Índia, pós-colonialismo, estudos de cultura, identidade, literatura.

Resumo alargado em português

Esta tese tem como ponto de partida investigar como uma *ideia da Índia* poderia ser construída e compreendida através da ficção pós-colonial indiana escrita em inglês, utilizando como textos base *The God of Small Things* (1997), romance da escritora indiana Arundhati Roy, com qual ganhou o Man Booker Prize em 1997, e *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), segundo romance de Kiran Desai, que também venceu o Booker Prize em 2006.

Em 2010, quando iniciei a pesquisa para este doutoramento, a investigação sobre o romance indiano escrito em inglês era uma área já existente em Portugal na área dos estudos pós-coloniais e de identidade embora não tão desenvolvida como em países anglófonos. Desde o século XVIII que escritores indianos escrevem e publicam em inglês tanto na Índia, como fora dela. Após a independência, em 1947, e especialmente depois dos anos 80, um grupo de escritores começou a produzir um *corpus* de textos que poderia considerar-se como um "guia" para a Índia e ser reconhecido pelo mundo como tal. Esta tendência ganhou força em 1981 com a publicação de *Midnight's Children* de Salman Rushdie.

A minha investigação na área dos estudos pós-coloniais assim como a leitura mais aprofundada dos romances que se enquadram nesta categoria foi principalmente influenciada pelo trabalho teórico de Elleke Boehmer (2005), Bruce King (1996 and 2004) Homi Bhabha (1990 e 1991), Lisa Lau e Ana Mendes (2011) e pelos ensaios de Salman Rushdie (1991). A análise desenvolveu-se através da interpretação de pontos de interesse nos romances de Roy e Desai e dos debates que daí surgiram. A presente tese baseia-se em ideias sobre o que constitui a identidade, sobre como a nação Indiana, as suas pessoas e cultura têm sido concebidas ao longo dos séculos e como o fim da era colonial, a globalização e as ideologias têm afectado as culturas e narrativas que as representam e que têm vindo a ganhar ímpeto nos meios literários e académicos.

O conteúdo temático dos dois romances, embora diferente em muitos dos aspectos ficcionais, trata da Índia do ponto de vista histórico, das realidades políticas, da língua, da religião, das classes sociais e castas, da diáspora, do género, do casamento e das relações amorosas. Aborda a família, as diferenças geracionais, e ainda os efeitos da globalização e ocidentalização na sociedade indiana.

É a forma como nestes livros as realidades históricas e culturais são apresentadas, assim como no romance *Midnight's Children*, que os torna objectos de estudo particularmente interessantes. Há um desafio implícito e explícito à institucionalização da forma romanesca e à estrutura das convenções culturais e narrativas, desafio esse percetível pela não temporalidade

e não linearidade, pela manipulação da língua, e através do retrato de grupos e minorias sociais da Índia, uma forma de denúncia social e política dessas realidades, através da escolha das personagens. São estes aspectos dos romances: o desafio da autoridade, das leis e das expectativas, articuladas pela poética pós-colonial que me levam a fazer uma leitura direcionada às transformações na cultura e sociedade indiana.

A acção de *The God of Small Things* decorre em Kerala no sul da Índia, na pequena cidade de Ayemenem onde grande parte da população é Síria Cristã, o primeiro estado da Índia, e do mundo, a eleger um partido comunista para o governo. A história abrange três gerações da família Ipe, ao longo de 23 anos, e descreve os acontecimentos na experiência dos gémeos, Estha e Rahel. A acção desenvolve-se no curto espaço de tempo associado ao afogamento de Sophie Mol, prima, e à morte de Velutha, um intocável, com quem Ammu, a mãe, se envolvera amorosamente. A acção de *The Inheritance of Loss* decorre em Kalimpong no norte da Índia perto da fronteira com o Nepal, no sopé dos Himalaias. As personagens principais são Jemmu Patel, um velho juiz reformado e amargurado, a sua neta, Sai, o cozinheiro e o filho, Biju. Os acontecimentos desenrolam-se durante uma revolta do grupo étnico e politico Ghorka, de Nepaleses Indianos nos anos 80s que exigiam autonomia da Índia. A acção decorre alternadamente entre a Índia e os Estados Unidos, onde o leitor vai seguindo a experiência de Biju como imigrante.

Os dois romances desconstroem a língua e a forma, recorrendo a técnicas diferentes, embora partilhando semelhanças para retratar a ideia das autoras respectiva às questões e à temática de que as narrativas se ocupam. A não linearidade, o cíclico regresso a momentos e temas específicos, o '*code-switching*' e a sensação de desconforto induzida por estas estratégias são recursos estilísticos utilizados em ambos os romances. Os efeitos narrativos destas histórias servem tanto a função estética como uma função sociopolítica e ideológica que se enquadram na forma base do romance pós-colonial de apropriação da história, inversão de poder e denúncia de injustiças sociais.

Na sua qualidade de expor a história, a cultura e identidade, pode afirmar-se, portanto, que o romance pós-colonial tem uma forma e papel tridimensional. É uma obra de ficção, uma etnografia e um documento histórico. Para conseguir esses três objectivos, o romance pós-colonial deve situar-se na experiência e perspectiva do autor, manifestar-se como objecto de arte, ser reconhecido como produto cultural e revelar os sinais requeridos para cada uma destas funções/categorias.

Esta capacidade de levantar debates sobre a natureza e representação da cultura, arte e teoria assim como a importância da objectividade e subjectividade na interpretação da história

e da cultura, e de como estes aspectos têm evoluído ao longo dos tempos torna o romance pós-colonial numa ferramenta útil para a construção de uma ideia sobre a Índia.

A presente tese está repartida por três capítulos e em cada um é desenvolvido um aspecto teórico relacionado com a Índia através dos dois textos de ficção escolhidos. O objectivo destas três abordagens é de analisar como é possível, através da ficção em inglês de escritores Indianos, residentes na Índia, ou na diáspora, construir ou reconstruir a história, desenvolver teoria e uma etnografia da Índia.

No primeiro capítulo é analisada a forma como a Índia foi concebida ao longo da história, de acordo com o desenvolvimento da ciência da história e algumas questões filosóficas em volta da temática. O debate culmina na ideia de que a história é construída pelos vários elementos que compõem a sociedade, mesmo os que foram silenciados pelo passado. As perspectivas mudam de acordo com as circunstâncias actuais políticas, sociais e económicas e as transformações que ocorrem no pensamento filosófico. Neste capítulo também é abordada a ideia da memória na construção da história.

O segundo capítulo é uma abordagem teórica, tendo com suporte alguns dos nomes mais influentes da teória pós-colonial como Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Elleke Boehmer e Bruce King na leitura e contextualização dos romances de Roy e Desai. Também são desenvolvidos outros aspectos que considero importantes como a apropriação da língua inglesa e a sua fusão com o Hindi, sobretudo, a diáspora, a representação de '*home*' e '*homeland*' nos romances, a deslocação e o trauma, entre outros aspectos relativos a este género literário.

No terceiro e último capítulo da tese é analisada a relação entre a ficção e a etnografia. Esta ligação baseia-se nos objectivos e processos de ambas as práticas narrativas. Na ficção, assim como na etnografia, é possível retratar grupos e práticas sociais, interações, leis, rituais, tradições, assim como o tempo e o espaço onde estes decorrem. Neste capítulo tento construir uma etnografia observando diferentes elementos sociais e como eles vão sendo mostrados nos romances: a mulher, a representação de castas, a da diáspora, a relação com os espaços, a religião, as minorias étnicas e outras metáforas culturais.

É também neste capítulo que é iniciado o processo de desconstrução de conceitos institucionalizados que têm sido utilizados na discussão teórica da literatura pós-colonial, assim como na presente tese. No final desta investigação, da leitura, da pesquisa, da escrita, da interpretação e de toda a reflexão sobre este tema com toda a informação reunida, o meu objectivo é concluir com a ideia de que estes romances revelam-se muito mais como uma 'evocação' da realidade indiana do que uma sua representação. Cada experiência é uma *história*

por contar e um ponto de partida para a construção da história e da identidade nacional e cultural. É nesse mesmo sentido que os conceitos tradicionais da história, da objectividade e do pós-colonial, perdem força e coerência à medida que as leituras mais subjectivas, a narrativa enquanto desafio à forma, aos estereótipos e às estruturas institucionalizadas, ganham relevância no contexto do pós-modernismo.

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Introduction

This thesis is the result of a project that has spanned over 6 years during which my ideas have developed and my arguments expanded. The starting point for this research project which then branched out into the debate in this dissertation was to analyse how an *idea of India* could be constructed and understood through postcolonial fiction in English, focusing on the *The God of Small Things* (1997) Arundhati Roy's only novel, awarded the Man Booker Prize in 1997 and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) Kiran Desai's second novel (she had previously written *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* in 1998) and winner of the Man Booker Prize in 2006.

Starting my research into this subject, I soon realized that English literature on India had existed for centuries, just as Indian literature in English also had. Since the 18th century Indian writers in India had been publishing in English. Furthermore, in the 20th century there were writers of Indian descent like Naipaul writing in English, just as English writers such as Rudyard Kipling who had lived and written about India also in English. But these two latter categories were considered as 'outsiders'. It was after Independence in 1947 and especially after the 1980's that a body of writers producing the type of texts that could be used as a 'guide book' into India and be acknowledged by the world as such emerged. The beginning of the trend can be pinpointed to Salman Rushdie in the 1980s.

Ian Jack, editor of the 1997 *India: The Golden Jubilee, Granta* edition wrote in his 2015 introduction to the second issue of the magazine entirely dedicated to India[1]:

> In 1980 Anita Desai became the first India-born and India-domiciled writer to have a novel selected for the Booker shortlist, her *Clear Light of Day*, but the big change came after Salman Rushdie published *Midnight's Children* the following year. The charge could be laid against him that, as a product of an English private school and an ancient English university who had settled in London, he too was an outsider. But he had grown up in Bombay and didn't approach his subject with a stranger's eye. A new post-imperial generation recognized themselves in a novel that brilliantly evoked the India in which they'd come of age, and its worldwide

[1] The first edition of Granta entirely dedicated to India was published in 1997, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the nation's Independence.

success encouraged young Indian writers to see that their country not only offered important things to describe but also that they might be the best people to describe them. (Granta 2015: 9-10)

And so fiction as a creative art became a way of describing India to a global audience. But other artistic products depicting the nation and its (changing) culture also emerged from India for the rest of the world by Indian film makers and authors, from India and the diaspora. Satyajit Ray, a Bengali filmmaker renowned worldwide, Deepa Mehta with, among others, her "Elements Trilogy" *Fire* (1996), *Earth* (1998) and *Water* (2005), Mira Nair's films such *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) and *The Namesake* (2006) are some examples of how Indian culture has been diffused through film. In fiction, many South East Asian fiction writers, not only from India, but also from Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal and from the diaspora such as Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Michael Ondaatje, Samrat Upadhyay and Jhumpa Lahiri, to mention just a few are writing and being published in English also helping in the global spread of Indian culture since Independence.

Neither Roy nor Desai has published any long fiction since the two texts being analysed in this thesis. Roy, having written that one successful novel, then turned to social and political activism, which again according to Ian Jack, "suggests that in India as elsewhere some questions are too urgent to be left to the novelist" (Granta 2015:11). Notwithstanding this last point, Indian fiction in English did boom in its representation of India, its history, people, culture, traditions, society, geography, gastronomy and all other aspects which came to be depicted in the novel. And the demand and interest for these novels grew because of the pleasure in reading and learning more about India and its people and culture, but also as an academic and theoretical branch. This, understanding why and how the Indian postcolonial novel in English had come to represent the nation and culture, was my initial approach to the theme. But my objectives developed further.

Research into the novels and postcolonial theory in general, especially influenced by the work of Elleke Boehmer (2005), Bruce King (1996 and 2004) Homi Bhabha (1990 and 1991), Lisa Lau and Ana Mendes (2011) and Salman Rushdie (1991) resulted in the cognitive processing of different points of interest in the novels and so further adjacent lines of thought emerged. Ideas on what constitutes identity, on how the Indian nation, people and culture have been understood over the centuries, and on how the end of colonialism, globalization

and developing ideologies have affected cultures and the narratives that represent them, began to gain shape.

There were three other aspects of these novels that also interested me. First it was the use of the English language in the narratives, how the language is used and played with, appropriated by the writer and why. To this use of the language in the narratives it was possible to apply the theories on World *Englishes* developed by David Crystal, Braj Kachru and Jennifer Jenkins to understand the local adaptations of English as an International Language. It was also possible to extract a glossary and grammar of Indian English "Hinglish" from Roy and Desai's texts which, though not thoroughly explored in this dissertation, it is research I intend to pursue. Second, it was the fact that both novels had been awarded the Man Booker Prize, just as *Midnight's Children* also had in 1981. This had been one of the reasons why I had picked up and read each of the three novels in the first place. Although I decided not to pursue this perspective in my thesis, the idea that artistic and cultural production is, beyond individual motivation and artistic expression, also dependent on the commercial supply and demand, governed by the socio-economic and political forces at work is an underlying argument in my discussion. Thirdly, and this aspect I do develop in the third chapter of my thesis, with my initial training in social anthropology and never having had the opportunity to do any fieldwork at a professional or academic level, the narratives provided me with the "virtual" space where I could pursue my fieldwork. I was allowed into the community or the culture with its practices and interactions, public and private life, as an observer, as a listener, as a reader and as an interpreter of a country I have never visited, of a people I only know of as diasporic subjects and of a culture and history I only know of intertextually.

The writing of many well-known anthropologists gave relevance and theoretical support to my arguments in Chapter 3 as well as for my concluding thoughts. I base a lot of my debate on the work of James Clifford, especially the book he co-edited with George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), but also initially from his essay "Diaspora" in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late 20th Century* (1997) on the work of Clifford Geertz, Margaret Mead, Paul Stoller and Michel de Certeau.

For all the reasons mentioned so far, along with the fact that both are excellent books I greatly enjoyed reading, I decided to analyse *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The God of Small Things* for one further reason which had to do with how the narrative was shaped. Roy and Desai may fit into the category of postcolonial writers of the Indian subcontinent who write in English and their narratives follow from the style that was begun with the publication of Salman Rushdie's, *Midnight's Children* (1981). The thematic content of both novels, though different in plot, location and characters deals with India through a depiction of the history, politics, religion, class, caste, diaspora, gender relations, marriage and love, family, generational differences as well as the effects of globalization and Western influences on Indian society. What interested me in these books, as in *Midnight's Children,* however, was the form through which these cultural and historical realities were depicted. There was both an implicit and explicit challenge of institutional form and structures in the narrative, perceivable through the non-temporality, non-linearity, the language and socio-cultural roles of Indian subjects depicted in the choice of characters. It was the so cleverly articulated defiance of authority, of laws and of expectations, articulated through postcolonial poetics that attracted me to further read into both novels and to try, based on my own interpretation, with theoretical support, to better understand these two narrative and through them, India's changing culture and society.

The God of Small Things is set in Kerala in the south of India, a town where a high percentage of the population is Syrian Christian and the first state in India and in the world to elect a Communist party for government. The story told through the twins, Estha and Rahel's experience, spans over three generations in the Ipe family history, 23 years in total, though the actual plot occupies only 14 days surrounding the tragic event of the death by drowning of young Sophie Mol, the twin's cousin. *The Inheritance of Loss* is set in Kalimpong in the north of India close to the border with Nepal and shadowed by the magnificence of the Himalayas. The main characters are a grandfather, Jemmu, his granddaughter, Sai, the house cook and his son, Biju. The story develops through a series of events in the 1980s during the Ghorka uprising and jumps back and forth between the United States, to tell of Biju's experience as an expatriate, and Kalimpong where Sai, the grandfather and the cook construct their experiences.

Both novels play with language and form, resorting to different, yet similar narrative techniques to portray the author's ideas on the issues and theories the narratives revolve around. The non-linearity, constant return to specific moments and themes, the code-switching and disruptive feeling are all features found in both novels. The narratives features in these stories have an aesthetic role but also a socio-political function which fits into the formula underlying the idea of postcolonial works of fiction. It could be argued, then, that the postcolonial novel because of what it is trying to portray, has a tridimensional role and form. It is a work of fiction, an ethnography and a historical document. In order to comply with this role and form, the narrative must contain a story or stories, speak through author's experience as a work of art, be acknowledged as a cultural product and contain enough meaning to be recognized by an audience as pertaining to each of these categories. In Paul Stoller's lecture "The Burden of Writing the Sorcerer's Burden: Ethnography, Fiction and the Future of Anthropological Expression," delivered at the University of Manchester earlier this year, he discusses his fictional novel based on his ethnographic experiences. When he asks his Niger mentor on whose knowledge the novel is based, what he thinks of the story he replies (I quote from Stoller's lecture):

> "There is not enough of me in it and there's not enough of you in it. Is it a story that my grandchildren and your grandchildren will read and discuss?"
>
> In other words is this a story that is going to stand the test of time? A story that will have legs of some sort? And that has been my challenge for writing in anthropology, for anthropological writing. How do you craft a text that remains open to the world? (Stoller 2016)

It is this capability to raise debates on the nature and representations of culture, art and theory as well as on the values of objective and subjective approaches to the understanding of history and culture and how these aspects are challenged over time that makes the postcolonial novel such a useful 'tool' in the construction of an idea of India.

This thesis is divided into three chapters each of which deal with a theoretical aspect of India approached through the narratives selected. In other words, my attempt in this research is to understand how history, critical theory and anthropology are represented

through fiction. And how fictional narratives can help to construct or reconstruct the history, the theory and the anthropology of a nation like India.

I first discuss how the novels of Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy can help us understand India by portraying parts of Indian society as the pieces that compose the larger picture, its cultural history. There are opposing perspectives at work in this effort. On the one hand, it is necessary to understand the Indian nation today and the social, political, cultural and economic transformations it has gone through as historical processes. On the other hand historical events must be understood and acknowledged as the forces that produced the important changes that led to the creation of the Indian nation today. Both processes of analyzing the nation are fundamental in the understanding of Indian cultural identity.

India is a nation with a thoroughly complex past and present cultural history and identity. It is composed of many different languages, ethnicities and religions. It is also governed by an ancient caste system and follows strict family and gender roles. It has been the location, and inherited the effects of two important Empires, of independence, of partition and diaspora. All of these social and historical factors have shaped Indian national and cultural identity. Furthermore Indian cultural identity is still undergoing transformations at many levels as a result of globalization, technology and diaspora.

A group of writers emerged with decolonization whose narratives were classified as postcolonial literature. These writers produced their work according to a logic which then would go on to define a formula for what has been traditionally understood as postcolonial literature. Almost seventy years on from the Independence of India from the British, postcolonial writers have become agents for the global spread of Indian history, culture and identity. A central debate in the discussion of Indian literature in English focuses on the role assumed by Indian writers who write in English. Indian scholar and writer Makarand Paranjapee claims the “proportions are so immense that it makes us [Indian English writers] wonder if we’re merely subjects of history or conscious agents of change.” (Paranjape 2005)

In a nation that has experienced so many historical processes over the decades, which embraces such differences and which is composed of such a scattered population, what narrative, if any, will best suit and define its identity? The emergence of the postcolonial as a literary genre allowed for the unleashing of voices previously unheard. These included the

perspectives of women, of the lower classes and castes and of the immigrant communities and also the manifestation of the Indian people's view of their own history and culture, as an emerging voice as well. Furthermore those who were not able to express their opinions and experiences in written form could be written about by other writers. Roy's character, Velutha, or Desai's character, Biju are examples of how an untouchable or a migrant's experience would be written about by another author. These new emerging perspectives were fragments which contributed to the piecing together of an incomplete history. Postcolonial fiction emerged as a form of resistance to dominant structures that had defined academic thinking. Through the postcolonial, the past was (re)claimed and (re)structured according to a new subaltern dialectic and consequently manifested theoretically, artistically and culturally. But the central question still remained. In a country so culturally vast and complex and subjected to a past of dominance, what constitutes Indian identity, or *Indianness* as some critics have termed it, and who has the authority to claim agency and to define a form to represent the historical and cultural realities and processes involved?

> Now debates over what constitutes Indianness or on the cultural politics of Indian representations are really a part of what one might call the larger process of Indian self-apprehension and self-awakening. This process has been underway for several millennia; it is in this sense that we might say that the wonderful thing about India and its traditions is that they are never finished. Finished both in the sense of being completed and also in the sense of being exhausted, over, and dead. The recovery of the Indian selves, which is an ongoing process, has had some specific directions in the last two hundred years or so. This is a huge and ongoing narrative, which we might call "Project India," of which the constitution of the nation and the horrors of partition are crucial chapters. (Paranjape 2005)

Paranjape's perspective on the fact that India, writing about India and Indian identity add a relevant point of focus to the debate. There are different phases that may be identified in the writing of India which involve a shift from the external to the internal, from a Western perspective to a national one, from a global or universal understanding to a local one and from the focus on time to a focus on space. As Paranjape argues, these shifts in perspective are an ongoing process whereby understanding the nation is simultaneous to an awakening and understanding of the self. As long as the societies and cultures keep evolving and changing

so will the narrative. The shift has been from the Orientalism of colonialism to a re-Orientalism in a post-colonial and henceforth era.

Prior to this so-called awakening and shift to the subaltern dialectic it was the Orientalist perspective which governed universal thought, politics and academia, according to Edward Said's pioneering discourse on the matter. The belief systems which the Orient lived by, including the literature, language, religion and laws were not considered a convincing enough structure for the Indian people to be recognized as a civilized culture by European standards. Not even ancient Sanskrit texts about Indian culture and religion through which social roles and laws were defined were regarded as valid documents for an empirical reading of India. These texts were of value to be studied only for an understanding and acknowledgment of the Indian people as primitive, as argued by James Mill in *The History of British India* written in 1817.

> The wilderness and inconsistency of the Hindu statements evidently place them beyond the sober limits of truth and history; yet it has been imagined, if their literal acceptation must of necessity be renounced, that they at least contain a poetical or figurative delineation of real events, which ought to be studied for the truths which it may disclose. (Mill 1975: 33)

Otherwise, Indian ancient writings were of no interest to most European thinking and objectives on the Orient in the time of imperialism. Considered as empirically relevant as "fables" or "legends" and of no factual or intellectual value, knowledge of Hindu texts and laws would only further endorse the European ideal of dominance over India as of the rest of the world. "The Hindu legends still present a maze of unnatural fictions, in which a series of real events can by no artifice be traced." (Mill 1975:33) Orientalism, rather than being a medium through which the Orient would be introduced and revealed to Europe, dictated and manipulated the way the Orient was viewed and dealt with. What could be heard and acknowledged as the "authentic" Indian voice and identity through its literature and culture was denied a discourse of its own to present to the world. The prevalent voice and perspective of the 19th century, that which dominated was the European. In this case, the British as a nation assumed a position of authority and dominance over the Indian people who were unable to overrule this power.

As a result, Indian history and identity, as written about in the 18th and 19th centuries, was the result of a European logic according to mainly British philosophical, political and educational values and standards, though also more general European values and thought systems which governed Western politics and society. How the people of India lived, their customs, habits and traditions, their relationship with the landscape and climate, with each other and their knowledge of science and laws was seen and understood through the British perspective and given the value which best served its ideological purpose of the time. Indian people were therefore considered as backward with little scientific knowledge, and with the exception of the higher Brahmin caste, most of the population was assumed as lacking in civilization. Though this was not the real and authentic India, though it may not have been the way the British officer, politician, man or woman of any profession or ranking actually saw and considered the Indian people, it was the belief that dominated Orientalist thought and the first idea of India.

> One can have no quarrel with such an ambition in theory, perhaps, but in practice the reality is much more problematic. No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of society. These continue to bear on what he does professionally, even though naturally enough his research and its fruits do attempt to reach a level of relative freedom from the inhibitions and the restrictions of brute, everyday reality. For there is such a thing as knowledge that is less, rather than more, partial than the individual (with his entangling and distracting life circumstances) who produces it. Yet this knowledge is not therefore automatically nonpolitical. (Said 1995:10)

To understand this structuring of ideas it is necessary to move even further back in time and discuss origins of historical thought. Philosophical discussion on the nature of historical writing and the science of history that appeared in the 18th century. With philosophers of the Enlightenment the "focus of historical writing shifted from political events and the "chronicles of kings" to the history of the human mind and its creations: religions, philosophies, morals, customs," (Mazzeo 1991:381). In other words, historians and philosophers began to give importance to the writing of ideas and thoughts as necessary and essential processes in historical interpretation. "Indeed, not only was the domain of history broadened during the course of the eighteenth century but historians came to seek in the

thought and culture of the past for clues to those over-arching patterns which might govern the flux of history itself." (Mazzeo 1991:381) The actions of men, therefore, came to be considered as inseparable from the political, philosophical and cultural systems which generated them and also inseparable from the ideologies through which they were defined and expressed. There was, according to Hegel, a strict and intimate relationship between philosophical thought and cultural life and expression. Any given period in the history of mankind was inevitably dominated by ideological patterns which ruled over the actions of men and resulted in historical events.

An opposing approach to the Hegelian logic in the understanding of history came later in the 19th century, when cultural historians such as Burckhardt and Dilthey challenged that philosophical thought and historical events did not replace each other in succession, but rather had to be understood as a unified whole. Through studying the past, mankind was able to define itself in the present. Man could identify in the past recurrent and contemporary actions and thought which resounded and gave sense to his present lifestyle.

Although since the Classics, with Ancient Greek epics such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, literature, history and myth had always maintained a close relationship, prior to the writing of history and the emergence of print what could have been considered literature was the act of storytelling through the oral tradition. Literary texts as written documents gained importance during the 19th Century and increasingly thereafter as cultural and historical sources. Through the written text a more complete and thorough understanding of human thought and relations at a particular time and place could be constructed and analysed. Literature, culture, nationality and identity therefore began to develop as inseparable forms. Texts contained stories, whether more factual or more imaginary, or as a mixture of the two. In order to learn about a nation's culture it was necessary to read and interpret its texts, just as to better understand a nation's literature it was necessary to know the culture which created it. And both sides of the mirror had to be understood within the socio-cultural, political, philosophical, and later theoretical circumstances that produced it. Through literature a passageway into a culture was created.

> Only by complete immersion in the art, religions, philosophy, science, manners, and social conventions of an age do we come to know fully its style and idiom, only so do we come to understand its inner language, what it means by what it says. Our understanding of the past thus begins with a confrontation with systems of signs and symbols, and ends with the discovery of the meanings they carry. The world of culture is simply the world of meanings and, in its temporal aspect, the world of culture is history, the history of meanings. In this sense, all cultural history is, implicitly or explicitly, the history of ideas or meanings. (Mazzeo 1991:387)

Through the interpretation of its texts, with the metaphors and signs that give it meaning, a nation and culture could be discovered and uncovered. And the cultural metaphors found in the texts would lead to a reconstruction of the history and the ideas that had led to its creation. A nation's literature contains the stories of its people which are fundamental for a better understanding of its history and culture. Fiction opened a new dimension by portraying the lives of people of all social backgrounds. Through this literary medium the lives, dialogues, thoughts and experiences of the common man/woman or person became relevant to the construction of the nation. It is not only the minds and actions of great men which shape a nation's identity. It is through the experience of women and men, the differences in generations and the depictions of daily lives that, piece by piece, one can begin to build an idea of the whole.

The adoption of the English as a literary language by the Indian intellectual, academic and political elite resulted in political and culturally inspired writing by national figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Jawaharlal Nehru. The thoughts, fiction and historical interpretations of those who were able to use this linguistic medium started to spread to the Western world. This phenomenon first took place in the 18th century with early literature in English. But later during colonial India the views of this English speaking and writing elite started to be recognized and accepted and with the coming of Independence in the mid-20th century this trend developed and expanded and seemed unified in its form and objective. Interest grew for a writing on India, its people, land and customs, by Indians themselves. For the first time in Indian history, a group of voices emerged to speak of India through fiction, and fiction written in English. By this time writers and political thinkers such as Ghandi or later, Salman Rushdie, had already adopted British ways and a new form of identity had been created which a part of Indian society came to incorporate as their own.

Lisa Lau and Ana Mendes explore the concept of "re-Orientalism" (Lau and Mendes 2011) which seems to emerge with the rise of Indian writers writing in English after independence and with the writers of the second diaspora. In the 19th and early 20th century Indians moved to islands of the Caribbean and parts of Africa to work on plantations social groups from which later generation writers emerged. V.S. Naipaul is an example of this social and cultural phenomenon. But it was later with the diasporic movement that followed independence that writers gained consciousness of their Indian roots, history and the need to express belonging giving way to this literary trend. Re-Orientalism, contrary to Orientalism, is a term used to define how Orientalis have been defining, or re-defining the Orient since Independence. The publication and success of *Midnight's Children* was in part due to the fact that it told the world about India, and about how individual history and identity is connected to that of the nation. From the socio-cultural studies perspective, this novel delineated a model for Indian literature in English, for diasporic writers and from those of a higher social stature, reaching out to a Western or generally higher intellectual Indian audience for an idea of India.

> The totalizing perspective of *Midnight's Children* presumes a cosmopolitan English-language reader. The novel provides all the background that an interested Western reader unfamiliar with Indian history would need to know. Saleem embeds in his narrative English translations of the Hindi-Urdu words he uses and explains his many references to religion and history. He even tells us when he has made an error. As a result, many a Western reader has relied on *Midnight's Children*, as on the film *Ghandi*, for a pocket overview of twentieth-century Indian history. (Kortenaar 2004: 232)

Rushdie is, in Lau's and Mendes's terms, a re-Orientalist. The fact that he wrote in English in a form accessible and recognizable to the Western world helped to perpetuate the idea of India to the rest of the world, and to come to learn the Indian reading of its history. Salman Rushdie's success, as Kortenaar continues,

> is primarily attributable to his condensation of many of the anxieties and concerns identified as postcolonial: how to imagine the nation-state; how to write the history of those denied a history; how to locate oneself in a world of intersecting languages and communities; how to be postmodern and write from the periphery; how to imagine hybridity and migration. (Kortenaar 2004: 230)

With *Midnight's Children,* and other novels by English speaking Indian writers, it became possible to understand India's identity within a post-colonial context and the difficulty of the Indian people in writing a history for themselves prior to Independence. Though the perspective had shifted, once again, as had previously happened with the British command over history and national identity, the writing of nation and diffusion of culture was in the hands of a specific group and not of society as a whole.

It was this process of overturning the dominant Western discourse, though with some submission to the European form that resulted in the postcolonial idea of the nation, culture and identity that began to take shape in the late 20th century and thereafter. Following the discussion on shifting perspectives in the writing of history and on the formation of the nation through an understanding of the past and present circumstances of Indian people, the second chapter of this thesis then develops around the critical theory surrounding the emergence of new cultures and identities in a post-colonial era and on the recognition of the writers of this 'movement' as title holders of India.

To understand India today and how its history or histories have been constructed over the centuries, it is fundamental to look to India's past, as being made up of two main important historical periods and one foundational moment which changed the whole Indian perspective. These periods and date are, the Mughal Empire, British India and August 15th 1947.

These three historical markers are important because, first, the Mughal Empire was responsible for the establishment of Islam as one of the major religions of India, along with Hinduism, which has resulted in division and conflict in modern India. It was also a time when many of the man-made structures that comprise Indian cultural and material heritage were built. Some of these are part of the global imagination on India, such as the Taj Mahal, for example, which was built by a Mughal Prince. Secondly, the East India Company, the British Raj, and the overall effect of British presence and domination left important marks on Indian society visibly noticeable in their adopted customs, language resulting in the routes of the Indian diaspora when Indians in the 20th Century emigrated to the UK and the USA, Canada and Australia, establishing themselves in many different academic and professional fields such as medicine, law and engineering as well as sales and electronics. Lastly, the independence of India, on the other hand, gave the Indian people a sense of awareness of who

they were or could be, as a nation and culture. This moment and its symbolic meaning created an ongoing relationship with the re-writing and re-interpretation of Indian history thus fostering the construction of an identity of the Indian nation, which in the web of globalization, quickly became available and in demand by the rest of the world.

Understanding these three historical periods and their effect on Indian cultural heritage and shaping of identity is an important initial step in the understanding of India as a nation and culture today. While recognizing that these are fundamental periods in Indian history, it is then necessary to determine how the Indian people expressed their thoughts in the past, if at all, and how experience of these three historical periods as manifested today is a reclaiming of a history that was never told. How the Indian people make sense of their past as a fundamental factor of the present and how this fact is expressed in postcolonial narratives is another aspect I am trying to tackle in the second chapter.

Independence defined a common point of departure for all Indians. A collective memory over a common point of reference for people of all ethnicities, castes and religions. This identification with independence marked the beginning of India's perception of itself. Although India had existed even prior to the Mughal Empire and Indian culture and tradition had continued to exist during the British Raj, with the coming of independence in 1947, Indian people finally gained control over their own destiny, over the reinterpretation of their own history and were able to manifest an understanding of themselves.

In Hegelian thought, historical thinking "is a kind of intellectual journey" (Mazzeo 1991:383) whereby ideas generate further ideas and so forth. These ideas or what Hegel considered the "Absolute spirit" were manifest through the deeds and thoughts of men. Considering it was at that moment in history, August 15th 1947, that the Indian people gained self-awareness and were finally, and for the first time, provided with the opportunity to structure themselves as a nation, and to give voice to their experience, then it is here that the history of India told by India begins. "From the human point of view, that journey began with the awakening of man's philosophical consciousness, when man first began to reflect on his experience and confronted himself with a thinking self" (Mazzeo 1991:383). But this point of departure shoots both backwards and forwards in time, the idea of the cyclical return is here

also introduced as interpreters of history rework the past in the light of the present circumstance.

British presence in India had lasting effects on the Indian nation and the cultural identity of its people. It not only brought about important reforms in education, land ownership, law, and politics, but also left another important and in many ways, unifying mark, the English language. Post-colonial Indian writers assumed English in the construction of a metahistory of India and an anthropology of the Indian post-independent society, for the Western world. The very term post-colonial implies everything that followed the colonial period which include those foreign forms, such as language, prose and cultural icons adopted by the colonized nation. The emergence of these new cultural and artistic forms of expression became representative of a newly manifested national identity with many adopted and adapted characteristics which came to be considered as indigenous in a new, not post-colonial, but postcolonial sense. Postcolonial, more than defining a period in time following colonialism, represents a cultural form, pattern, standard, a way of defining a socio-cultural reality.

One of the expectations and that which raised most question marks in postcolonial literature was the notion of authenticity. However, defining what is authentic in a world of subjectivities is a complex process, just as representing anything objectively through human perception is also a complex task. Interpretations of cultural realities can be represented through the author's imagination and its authenticity depends on the experience and possibly also the intention of the writer, which in turn is inseparable from the cultural circumstances he/she is coming from. The most democratic approach to this problematic would be to acknowledge the creative value of authenticity. Each author's depiction of the world is a product of his/her own interpretation, experience and cultural sphere, and therefore authentic simply because.

> They [ideas] are spurs to action, they harness the passions of men, they are not only propositions but also experiences, and, as such, a single idea will find multitudinously varied expression and many diverse contexts. For even if all men should abstractly understand an idea alike, no two men will experience it in exactly the same way. (Mazzeo 1991:393)

By piecing together the experiences of men, expressed through different forms of art, an idea of India would begin to take shape which would only make sense and be accepted by the Indian nation as a whole if perceived as being the construction of a collective, fragmented piece of historical memory. As Salman Rushdie defended in his essay "Imaginary Homelands", writers such as himself, who have voluntarily or otherwise been exiled from their ancestral homeland, "will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind." (Rushdie 2010: 10)

The India and its people of Rushdie's fiction, as in other Indian authors writing in English from the late 20th Century onwards are re-creations or versions of India according to individual experience and subjective interpretation. Authenticity, therefore, must be acknowledged through an understanding of the socio-cultural context which has structured both the imagination and cognitive processes of these writers. Furthermore, one must question the writer's intention, if any, in writing as they do. Writers may be portraying certain cultural practices, may be denouncing social or political realities, may be making sense of their own circumstances, or they may be simply creatively experimenting with aesthetics using Indian realities as the subject. Nevertheless, it is precisely the incomplete nature of the writing that gives it such meaning in a postcolonial context. "It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost." (Rushdie 2010: 11) The fragments are the elements used in the piecing together of a meaningful whole. Each and every construction and reconstruction of the whole is fundamental to the defining of the individual self (identity) and to how each individual is then connected to the understanding of the whole (nation).

> But human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all the senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death. (Rushdie 2010:12)

The discussion introduced in the preceding paragraphs is included in the third chapter of this thesis where the idea of the fictional narrative as ethnography is developed. In this third and final chapter, the relationship and interconnected nature of ethnography and fiction is discussed by analysing the form, objectives and processes involved in both narrative practices. Through fiction, as in ethnography, it is possible to portray social practices, interactions, laws, rituals, traditions and the time and spaces when and where these take place. So I attempt to transcribe and describe, as an ethnographer would, Indian social and cultural practices through *observing* these aspects as depicted in the novels. I therefore reflect on how women, caste, diaspora, landscapes, generational differences, religion and ethnicities and cultural metaphors are learned about through Roy and Desai's narratives.

It is in this third chapter and through to the end of my conclusion that I also begin the deconstructive process of institutionalized terms that have been used in theoretical discussion of postcolonial literature, and also throughout my thesis. By the end of my research, reading, writing, interpretative and cognitive processing of the information, these novels reveal themselves as much more of an 'evocation' of India than a representation. In the same way the very notions of history, objectivity and postcolonial lose their coherence as the more subjective readings and the challenge of form and institutionalized structures gain relevance in the postmodern debate.

In recent years, multiple artistic expressions of India as a nation characterized by multiple religions and languages, and divided by caste, class and gender, re-created by Indian artists for the Western world, such as Indian writing in English, has been growing in demand. This is a nation with a deep-rooted, rich and varied culture, as can be seen from the antiquity and diversity of its religious practices, art, architecture and social structure, but it is also a nation whose historical register keeps re-working and re-defining itself. With decolonization, migration and diaspora, globalization and so many external forces working their way into the culture and resulting in the production of new political, historical, cultural and economic forms, India's identity is still in the process of defining itself.

Indian tradition is strong, even in a diasporic context, this is why it has survived and resisted change in many aspects over centuries. Indian expats re-work social structures through customs and collective experiences in a new society. These expressions define them

as a cultural community and may be anything from gatherings, the celebration of rituals, the preservation of traditions, the commercialization of regional products, etc. But in contemporary society, new cultural forms are constantly emerging and are also assimilated into the culture(s), and so new possibilities, and cultural fusions emerge. When built on solid foundations such as the fusion of Indian culture with the English language, these hybrid identities foster an interesting and valuable dialogue between nations and societies, giving way to new cultural products. But at times, hybridity and the excessive artificial and superficial nature of cultural products in an overly commercially Orient ated society creates fragilities such as the questioning of authenticity. Either way, this current phenomenon resultant from the globalization of culture leads to further interest, demand, research and theories on the postcolonial, and on the relevance of this term in current times where the postmodern as a defining form seems to have taken over. And as interest for India grows in Western societies, conciliation between tradition and a postmodern definition of identity in a globalized world is what reaches out to both Indian and Western audiences today.

Contemporary Indian artists such as Indian film makers and Indian writers who produce and create in English are an important piece in the construction of India's cultural puzzle and in the definition of Indian national identity. In their novels, Indian writers' writing in English reveal, whether consciously or not, many characteristics of inherited Western influences on Indian traditional culture such as, the narrative form of the novel, the use of English language incorporating Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam or other words in Indian languages, the depiction and denunciation of caste, the struggle with accepting traditional gender roles, especially by women, generational conflicts, feelings of longing and belonging of immigrants, the depiction of social habits and customs, and how a traditional society can find its way and maintain its structure within a globalized one.

All these characteristics are cultural realities and fundamental issues that Indian people and society are dealing with today. And they are expressed and have become a fundamental and recurring theme in the fiction of contemporary Indian authors writing in English. History has influenced and is symbolically or metaphorically represented in fiction; and fiction, with its form, style, language, narrative and characters, has become a necessary tool in historical interpretation or for the construction of a cultural history.

The reading and dissection of Roy and Desai's narratives provides an understanding of India; not only the India represented in the novels through the characters, the language, the culture, the landscape, the conflicts and inequalities and other aspects of the stories, the author's idea of India, but also a more general idea of the processes that created India as the world experiences it today. These novels are also used in support of my argument that an empirical understanding of India (as of any nation, with its history, culture and identity) is possible through individual (any individual that is part of a society) subjective experience and cognitive processing of that information. Memory, intertextuality and the constant return are fundamental to the ongoing relationship between the past and present in the search for identity. The individual story is essential to the piecing together of society and to the writing of a national history. It is through the individual that everything is perceived. It is through an interpretation in the present that the past, present and future of the world is conceived of and it is through the individual in the present that the narrative, any narrative is written. Being a supporter of progress and development at all levels I am also a firm believer in the importance of the preservation of the past, even if through collective memory, and of one's own national and cultural heritage in the structuring of identity. No individual understanding of the self can exist without a connection to the past, to the culture, the history and the nation to which one feels they belong. As Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish expresses in his poem "I belong there":

I belong there. I have many memories. I was born as everyone else is born.
I have a mother, a house with many windows, brothers, friends, and a prison cell
with a chilly window! I have a wave snatched by sea-gulls, a panorama of my own.
I have a saturated meadow. In the deep horizon of my word, I have a moon,
a bird's sustenance, and an immortal olive tree.
I have lived on the land long before sword turned man into prey.
I belong there. When heaven mourns for her mother, I return heaven to
her mother.
And I cry so that a returning cloud might carry my tears.
To break the rules I have learned all the words needed for a trial by blood.
I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a
single word: *Home*.

(Darwish, 1986[2])

[2] This poem has been translated from Arabic differently according to the translator and edition, or source, and even the title alternates between, "I come from there" and "I belong there". Many translation found on websites and blogs unfortunately do not name the translator, so I have chosen to use the poem in the collection, *Unfortunately it was Paradise: Selected Poems* (2003) edited and translated by Munir Akash, Carolyn Forché, with Sinan Antoon and Amira El-Zein (accessed at https://books.google.com)

1

On historical constructions and the power of narratives

To compress the story of 5000 years into 500 pages is a task which, even in the best circumstances, must require the indulgence of the reader. (Singhal 1983:x).

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a citation à l'ordre du jour – and that day is Judgement Day. (Benjamin 1977: 254)

The 19th Century in India

The main discussion that I would like to develop in this chapter emerges from the question of whether historical writing is born out of the academic endeavour to objectively compress the story of a nation into a factual reproduction of events, or whether it could be understood as the process of recreating events and reworking them into narratives that gain value through individual experience. The narratives, whether fictional or non-fictional, that describe and portray national events of the past and present do so through individual interpretation of a collective experience. Consequently, history and ethnography and how these are depicted and understood are the result of the political, theoretical and philosophical tendencies at work and as such can be considered as cultural products of the present. But what is the present and how could culture, knowledge, and thinking have reached this point in development but through a natural and logical reflection and reaction to the past?

I begin my thesis with an analysis of historical thought on India as it developed according to the shifts in academic and philosophical trends as pertaining to two main distinct periods in the nation's cultural development, although I also make some references to the Mughal Empire and ancient India, especially when referring Hindu laws. The main points in

India's history I will consider and use for my interpretation and argument are: the British Raj and Independence. The period that follows Independence, which I refer to as decolonization, especially from a more theoretical perspective, will be dealt with in the second chapter of this thesis. In this section, I look at changing perspectives on historical science and how they have influenced and still today may influence the understanding of India's history and culture as interpreted along the centuries. My philosophical reading on the subject begins in the 18th and 19th centuries mainly with Kant and Hegel and the philosophical thought that was born of Voltaire, Rousseau, the Enlightenment and Romanticism, moving down chronologically to Hayden White in the 20th century and his ideas on the interpretation of history. During the 20th century, important theoretical approaches to post-colonialism became fundamental to the debate. As a pioneer in colonial and postcolonial theory was Edward Said with his influential theories on Orientalism, and central to subsequent theory, interpretation and writing were names such as Homi Bhaba, Elleke Bohmer and Gayatri Spivak. Later theories such as that of Lisa Lau and Ana Mendes with re-Orientalism and further postmodern approaches are all worked into my argument of how these critical and scientific theories on historical perspectives shape the reading of a contemporary novel. It is my objective in this chapter to examine how Indian Writing in English[3], specifically Arundhati Roy's and Kiran Desai's Booker Prize winning novels, *The God of Small Things* (1997) and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), previously referred and summarized in the Introduction, may, following my argument on the point of history, represent important postmodern aesthetic historical documents[4] in the understanding of India.

However, it is important to keep in mind and to consider a fundamental point I will be developing throughout my thesis and from a more theoretical perspective in this chapter, that literature and literary narratives are not factual documents, nor do I consider objectivity or scientific rigour absolute requirements in historical analysis. A major part of history is reconstruction and interpretation. Historical facts and events are depicted and incorporated in fiction, but in the imaginative realm, through creative writing. Subjective interpretation of

[3] Indian Writing in English is the term that will be mostly used in this dissertation on referring to post-Independence Indian writers such as Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai or Arundhati Roy.

[4] Concepts such as "history", "aesthetics", "postmodern" will be analysed throughout my thesis.

events and poetic liberty are at the foreground of creation and re-creation as aesthetic processes are at work in the production of a fictional narrative. A novel has mainly artistic value, whereas a historical text is meant to be a non-fictional piece of work, and is valued for its objectivity and for the quality of its analysis. But in the process of analysing and writing on the part of the author, as in the reading and assessment on the part of the reader, there are always subjective and imaginative factors at work. Therefore, and for the purpose of my thesis, an aesthetic and creative relationship between the fictional narrative and historical writing and the purely interpretative qualities of both has to be explored and acknowledged. This aspect: the relationship between fiction and cultural studies, will also be dealt with in further detail in my third chapter.

Tracing Indian history or records of Indian history in its entirety is an academic task which has occupied the minds of historians, anthropologists, theorists and philosophers for centuries. In the early days of British imperial expansion into South East Asia, when there was a developing concern in Western academic thought for a philosophical and scientific understanding of history and its subsequent writing, philosophers and historians were equally concerned with how to incorporate the world as a whole within a universal logic. This universal logic was conceived of and perceived through the minds of a European male intellectual elite, so how, or if, the "other" interpreted its past and had an understanding of its historical reality was somewhat beyond Western thought, interest or dialectics. To further enhance this Eurocentric positioning of historical discourse, political and imperialistic interests were at play in Britain's motivations in India, as well as in other nations which had also travelled to the East on their voyages. The 19th century political interpretation and use of the ideas of the Enlightenment empowered European colonial aims by endorsing the notion and understanding of history as universal truth, and claiming that as a civilizational aspect the Orient lacked.

The 19th century was a time of great thinkers like Hegel, Darwin and Marx, as well as others. Scientists and philosophers of the time were trying to make sense of a rapidly changing, evolving world in the fields of industry, technology, science and political thought. With the expansion of European nations into the other continents, Asia, Africa, the Americas and Oceania and as a result of the contact with what the European intellectual elite termed

"the other", a scientific and philosophical interest grew for man, *its* evolution and history. There was a need to understand how it was possible to have such racial, structural and linguistic differences in the world. How was it possible for some parts of the world to have 'evolved' into civilization, from a European point of view, while others remained 'primitive'? Scientists and anthropologists alike also directed their objects of study at finding an empirical explanation to differences in both social systems and in the development of thought in and among different groups of people. Scientific enquiry, however, has always been used in benefit of the development of more advanced and powerful nations. And justifications for social, intellectual and cultural differences were accounted for by understanding the world with its different cultures as being positioned at different levels on a timeline of civilization. Central Europe, representing the Arian white man, was considered the most civilized of continents. The European model of civilization, and the white Aryan as a race, which had its origins in Classical Greece, was believed to have purely Indo-European ancestry. It was later argued in a three volume work by Martin Bernal[5] that European civilization had in fact also descended from African (Egyptian) and Semitic (Phoenician) origins. Though Classical Greek philosophers and historians such as Plato and Herodotus had acknowledged their diverse ancestry, the great thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries motivated by the scientific, philosophical and political developments of the time had adapted this historical information to best suit national and colonial interests. Though advances were being made in these fields, those responsible for the spreading of knowledge on the origins and differences of mankind, used and manipulated facts for ideological purposes and to foster colonial interests in the East.

A need emerged, in European nations, to expand political and territorial power even though the lands that were being discovered were inhabited by indigenous peoples. This

[5] Bernal, Martin (1991) *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization Volume One: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985.* Vintage. London.
Martin Bernal's research into the origins of Classical Greece was recognised, but also looked on with some degree of suspicion by other critics and historians. To quote the *New York Times* article following his death in 2013, "Mr Bernal was asked in 1993 if his thesis in "Black Athena" was "anti-European". He replied: "My enemy is not Europe, it's purity – the idea that purity ever exists, or that if it does exist, that it is somehow more culturally creative than mixture. I believe that the civilization of Greece is so attractive precisely because of those mixtures."
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/23/arts/martin-bernal-black-athena-scholar-dies-at-76.html?_r=0 (accessed 15/06/2016)

occupation of land has raised many important concerns on what claims can be made to land ownership, on the reappropriation of land on the part of indigenous people, such as the Aborigines in Australia, or the coming to terms with serious mistakes of the past which led to the destruction of native people, their homes and systems.

Contact with indigenous peoples caused both fear and fascination in European travellers and explorers. Politically and economically these people seemed easy, at first, to dominate and control. The apparatus that accompanied colonial expansion – the technology in ships and weapons, the apparent linguistic superiority and material power possessed and used by the men that arrived on new native territories also caused fear and awe in indigenous peoples. It was easy to dominate and impose power on a tribal community and on the land with which they (the indigenous tribes) had established a vital relationship before the arrival of colonials. It was also easy from a European perspective to treat natives as primitive and as monstrous in some cases and thereby controlling them, their habits and their land, even though in many colonial contexts their knowledge of the land was also important for the survival of the Europeans. As happened with the Native American Indians, British pilgrims made use of local knowledge of food and agricultural systems without which they would never have survived.[6] Along the same lines, and this is mentioned in *The Inheritance of Loss*, no European expedition would ever have been able to climb any of the mountains of the Himalayas, including Mount Everest, had it not been for the local people, the Sherpa, and their local knowledge.

Ongoing contact with natives as a result of colonial expansion and occupation of the lands brought about the need to further investigate and develop the study of man, as the 'other' had acquired a shape, that was slightly different from 16th and 17th century imagery of monsters. Racism, as scientific thought, prevailed in the 19th century, through Eugenics and Social Darwinism, a manipulation of Darwin's theories through which mankind was ordered hierarchically according to race, religion, social class, physical characteristics, gender or

[6] In the year of 1620, when a group of British pilgrims who sailed onboard the "Mayflower" arrived in what is today known as Cape Cod, they had experienced 66 days at sea and were ill, suffering from malnutrition and in no health and physical condition to survive the harsh North American winter. They remained on board for most of the winter and only at the break of Spring, at which time about half of the crew had died, did they dare leave the ship. They were then greeted and helped by Indians from the Abenaki and Pawtuxet tribes who taught them how to hunt, cultivate and prepare food with local products.

sexuality. It was now possible for anthropologists, biologists and other natural and evolutionary scientists to analyse and study their objects through first hand contact and observation, though it was convenient in the interest of imperialism and nationalist policies to keep the natives as inferior. Consequently, philosophers, theorists, scientists and historians also used this data to advance and develop their theories on man and the evolution of the world and societies through the interpretation of the facts that were reported back to them and through the incorporation of this *scientific* data within a more general ideal or utopic[7] view of mankind and existence.

It was through this academic, scientific and ideological endeavour that European thought retained control of the world despite the discovery of differences they had encountered, and the preservation of this cultural difference as well as the respect for indigenous communities and their connection to the land as a place of heritage. A European model of language, administration, religion and power was applied to indigenous communities regardless of their already existing cultural practices.[8] The empirical understanding and interpretation for academic and political purposes of the native systems these people had possessed prior to their arrival was done according to a European logic of the time. Through intellectual and scientific thought the Occident, therefore controlled the Orient , to use Edward's Said's terminology. The academic understanding of the Orient , which besides being scientific was also instrumental in its purpose, came to be famously categorized by Edward Said in 1978 as Orientalism.

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[7] Utopia, as argued by Terry Eagleton in his 2015 article in the *New York Times* has had many meanings and interpretations throughout history, from its first publication as British Lawyer and Puritan, Sir Thomas More's Utopia in 1516, to Marx's idea of utopian society with the overturning of the capitalist system in the 19th century, to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) to so much other political and philosophical thought, fantasy and science fiction that has been produced over the decades. The point of utopia could be to envision a perfectly functioning and just world according to political, scientific, economic, philosophical or human beliefs. Theories on utopia and utopian ideals have, however been used and many times abused as a justification for cruelty and violence inflicted on different groups in history. Such is the case of Hitler's Aryan ideals for Nazi Germany. Utopia as applied here is the ideal of human evolution and development towards the European ideal of civilization. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/16/utopias-past-present-thomas-more-terry-eagleton (accessed 15/06/2016)

[8] In 1513, the appropriation of territory in the New World was legitimized by Spanish officials representing the monarchy by the reading of "El Requerimento" to indigenous people in Castillian. Unable to speak the language and without a translation, the information that was read to them was not comprehended.

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient . (Said 1995:3)

According to Said, for the Occidental world, discovering the Orient was a fundamental step in the discovery and understanding the Occident had of itself. The "Orient ", an abstract term for unchanging exotic non-European nations was everything the Western world was not. In a time when Europe was deeply involved in the expansion of power and knowledge in all spheres, intellectual and scientific advances were synonymous with power. Knowledge of the new world was also a political endeavour. The terms, Orient and Occident, which were used to classify and to differentiate the different worlds, were not innocently chosen to define geographical regions, although they do in fact represent a physical division of the world between the East and West, but carried political weight of separating the two ends of the civilization ladder.

It is difficult, if not impossible, according to Said, to separate knowledge, especially knowledge of other socio-cultural or political nations from ideology or from the circumstances that shape the political minds of academics. Furthermore, how knowledge is structured and used is generally associated with political interests and in the case of the late 18th and early 19th century European objectives scientific and philosophical knowledge was used in the pursuit of power.

In brief, because of Orientalism, the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient , but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that particular entity "the Orient " is in focus. (Said1995:3).

So the Orient was a fact, a cultural reality, but the form into which it was shaped was a model empowered by Western academia and scientific thought. The idea of the Orient was generated by the cultural and political circumstances of at first the 18th and 19th Centuries and later Western superpowers and their political and economic interests. A philosophical idea,

historical writing, a work of art or literature cannot be read as an entirely individual project shaped by totally original ideas, free of cultural constraints. It has to be, inevitably, a product of its time and an expression of the cultural perspectives governing thought, beliefs, movements and trends. This was especially true in the 19th Century. Moving into the later 20th and 21st century much has changed, though cultural and artistic expression is still governed by economic, social and political trends, as I will go on to discuss later. Such theories have also been used to interpret historical writings and the positions of historians on a given event or moment in history. Orientalism, as Said has argued, has more to do with an understanding of European power cultural politics of the time than with an attempt at an empirical understanding of the East itself.

> For Orientalism brings one up directly against that question – that is, to realizing that political imperialism governs an entire field of study, imagination, and scholarly institutions – in such a way as to make its avoidance an intellectual and historical impossibility. (Said 1995: 14)

Imperial expansion and the political environment of the 18th and 19th centuries governed and restrained any possibility for freedom of thought and expression by institutionalizing and controlling academic and philosophical writing. According to Said and his quote above, it was not possible to envision and understand the Orient as an entity in itself, something which existed apart from the colonial perspective, because nothing was published from any perspective other than the prevailing Eurocentric one.

Orientalism was an academic perspective of non-European nations and cultures which applied to all fields from science to politics to art which left no room for development of thought outside its theoretical constraints. Social, cultural, racial, scientific and civilizational superiority of Europeans over the Orientals was an accepted fact and through this approach a formula for the portrayal, discussion or study of the Orient was delineated. It seems, therefore, that by Said's rationale, cultural, political and artistic expression was inescapably trapped within this imperialistic logic.

Models of civilization placed European culture, politics and thought on the highest axis of reason. Reason in the Enlightenment was a universal truth and worked as a structure

according to which the whole of mankind, independently of cultural differences was understood. The model, therefore, served as a universal code that would be applied to all nations and cultures of the world. European philosophical and political thought governed social, cultural and academic life. Individuality in cultural expression or in scientific or philosophical thought was not considered as relevant, and could even be viewed with suspicion within the logic of this universal and absolute reason. The differences in the social, cultural and belief systems encountered through contact with non-European nations were counteracted by a need to assimilate and control these contrasting systems through the idea of a superior and inferior culture. The confrontation of cultures would nevertheless bring about important historical changes in the cultural history of India and Britain, as of the world in general.

From a Eurocentric perspective, India as many other parts of the so-called "Orient " was in no intellectual position, at the time of the first encounters with the British colonialists, to defend its systems of thought, philosophies, and modes of expression. It did however, as Spivak has put forward, possess the necessary space for change, and perhaps colonialism ironically also opened up that possibility for change. Historical change is not necessarily achieved through the natural process and gradual transition from one state of being and existence into another, in fact, it seems unlikely that change will occur without some form of external influence. It can also be believed to be brought on through the result of breaks and reconnections in cultural systems and their meanings at a given time. India may be understood as a classic and functional example of how an ancient society was confronted with an external plan from which it rebuilt itself and its socio-historical identity. It is a society where the philosophical ideal of natural freedom was for centuries under constraint and overpowered by a more dominant and authoritative power. Through realization of its need to restore autonomy, India succeeded in overruling this foreign power and reconstructed itself. But this change is possible because of the social, cultural and political disposition of the nation or society and through the reinterpretation and reinvention of its national identity as a way of overcoming a period of tension, constraint, stagnation and repression.

According to philosophers of the Enlightenment, history involved the unfolding of a plan with a logical sequence, a pattern. The historical actions of men were equalled to the

working of nature, just as cycles or the natural evolution of the species. Nature was considered perfect in the view of the Enlightenment and man too could be as perfect as nature in the unfolding of a historical plan and in the move towards existential freedom. History did not happen by chance, nor was it an accident, nor was it in the hands of men. There was a higher purpose and history followed a plan from which men had no escape.

The scientific and theoretical impediments to this approach were that history could not be understood through pure observation as the events it was analysing, and trying to make sense of according to the universal plan, had already happened. Furthermore, these events were being judged or interpreted in the light of the present. It was necessary, therefore, not only to approach historical events from the philosophical stance of the moment, but also to understand events as the result of the actions and thought of men throughout history and marked by specific reasoning of a given time and place. The historian began to be understood as someone responsible for recreating and representing the actions of men that generated events through his own understanding of them, rather than as an objective observer of human action and a narrator of events.

Western political thought, language and the shield of civilization as a European traits were systematically used as factors of intellectual supremacy in European states governed and moved by imperial power and interests. The rest of the world from Africa, to Asia, to Polynesia and the Caribbean, with its culture and societies, independent of the social systems which identified them, not as a nation in Western logic, but nonetheless as a community with rightful ownership to land, to its traditions, religions, culture and social distributions were considered inferior and in need of intellectual, social and political instruction and consequently, the development and evolution believed necessary to reach the state of civilization.

The Mughal Empire which had ruled in India for nearly two centuries came into decline in the early 18th century for a number of different reasons as analysed by historians. It was mainly the weakening of military control as a result of continuous wars of succession for the throne by Mughal princes who had the support of the Hindus. As described in *The Oxford History of India*, the empire in its final phase suffered from increased anarchy, poverty, financial downfall and bad administration. When the last emperor, Aurangzeb died,

there was no one capable of succeeding him. The last two paragraphs on the Mughal empire in the *The Oxford History of India* conclude with the notion that the reasons for the collapse of the empire can be interpreted differently by different scholars and readers. This is an interesting supposition, and one that is directly connected to the line of thought of this thesis.

> The collapse of the empire came with a suddenness which at first sight may seem surprising. But the student who has acquired even a moderately sound knowledge of the history will be surprised that the empire lasted so long rather than because it collapsed suddenly.
>
> It would be easy to expand such observations, and to indicate other causes, as, for example, the neglect of sea-power, which contributed to the ruin of the Mughul empire; but it is needless to work out the theme in further detail. Every attentive reader of the story can fill in the outline in his own fashion. (Smith 2008: 442)

With the decline of Mughal rule, a new period of imperialism in India began to take shape, the British Raj. The British rule had been gaining momentum over the Portuguese, French, Dutch and other European interests in India during the dying phase of the Mughal empire. Their political, military and economic supremacy resulted in the establishment of British power in India in the 18th and 19th centuries, a historical fact which lasted two centuries and changed the natural course of Indian history.

India as a nation already existed, with religions, language, political systems and culture. But it was a divided nation and one which had already suffered the presence and imposition of foreign powers. It was a weakened and divided nation which easily fell into imperial hands once again. British rule was mostly motivated by commercial interests, and the policies they introduced in Indian society were meant to secure and better manage their economy and trade. Indian society may have benefited from a social, economic and political point of view with British presence, and a relation of dependence was established between colonizers and colonized until the 20th century. The benefits and power that India acquired through British presence and influence was recognized with the movement towards independence in 1947 and thereafter. To quote from *The Oxford History of India* on the settlement of British rule in India:

> The new rulers, it is true, were more alien than the former ones; their habits were more strange, their manners more aloof, their arrogance more marked. But then something happened. The new rulers reorganized the country more efficiently than before; they were self-consciously tolerant; they studied to preserve rather than destroy. But almost in spite of themselves new thoughts, new ideas, and new ways of life came into the country, with results which have proved incalculable in their range and depth. It is here that we can find the significance of the British connexion with India. The British were the harbingers of the West. At times unconsciously, at times with optimistic zeal, and at times with reluctance or dislike, they were the vehicles of Western influence in India. That is why their influence in India was proved creative, and why their period will be looked back on as formative for the India that is yet to be. The British provided the bridge for India to pass from the medieval world of the Mughuls to the new age of science and humanism. (Smith 2008: 450-51)

Despite being a little biased in its defence of British imperial expansion in India, there is nevertheless some truth in this notion. And though it took two centuries for the Indian people to finally overcome imperial domination, there were benefits that came to the nation and society as a result of British presence.

The British introduced industry and machinery to India, placing India, as a colony and later as an independent nation with its own economy in the global market. But in a world which is heavily governed by a powerful Western capitalist system no nation state can develop on its own, neither when analysed from a historical perspective of the effect of imperialism and colonialism, and still today, when understanding what makes a strong economic and political nation state, and how culture and culture industries are related to the economic systems. So, even though political and economic circumstances have changed, in present times, in all social, cultural and political systems there is a dependence on a global economy based on Western capitalist structures. This global economy defines the direction of all the cultural industries in the world. The Orient, following along the logic of a global economy, came to be an agent in its own Orientalism and this is something I will go on to discuss later in the chapter in the section on ‘re-Orientalism’.

Though the East India Company’s interests were mostly commercial ones, Britain began to gain increasing power on other administrative levels in India such as education, social and political affairs, culminating in full sovereign control in 1858. Under the leadership of Cornwallis, the distance between the British and the Indians increased as he excluded Indians from positions of administrative power and responsibility. Power was taken from the

Indians, consequently assuming that they were unable to properly govern themselves in such a way to meet international or European standards. Besides, the British ruled over India in the interest of the Indian people themselves, protecting them from outsiders and invaders, as well as helping them in the development of the nation. By the end of the 18th century, therefore, the relation of power and authority that was assumed by the British in India led to the ideological control of its people, traditional systems, culture and cultural expression. The British were able to achieve their control over India by uniting the people of different ethnic and religious groups and the land under one rule. The country, politically and financially weakened and in a state of anarchy, easily surrendered to British power and authority.

India in the time of the Mughals had thrived. Finances, political and social administration of the land and people had been organized and well commanded. The nation had flourished culturally, intellectually, artistically and in architectural splendour. In the period that followed, the decline of the Mughal Empire and the subsequent rise of the British Raj, cultural, intellectual and artistic production and development in India came to a halt. All possibility of local culture and tradition, not to mention intellectual capabilities were ignored and kept from revealing themselves.

Indian thought, culture and tradition was seen as useless in the age of Utilitarianism since it was filled with superstitious beliefs and served no purpose in a time that looked towards progress. Language, literature and education too, in this sense, became subjects of power and vulnerable to change.

According to *The Oxford History of India* up until 1818 the Indians offered little or no resistance to the British taking command of all aspects of social, political and cultural life. But resistance and power grew from within and as a result of the introduction and assimilation of British language and culture. Persian was replaced with English in the courts, and English language, literature and Western science were introduced to the Indian educational system.

The Act of 1813 provided that a *lakh* of rupees should annually be 'set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned Natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British Territories in India'. After ten years a Committee of Public Instruction was set up and began to encourage ancient learning, the modern sciences, and the teaching of English. Gradually the advocates of 'useful learning', encouraged from the India

House where James Mill was high in influence, grew more positive and more aggressive. The value of Indian learning and literature was questioned altogether. The controversy came to a head over a minor point; it provoked Macaulay's famous and heavily overcharged minute and led to Bentick's fateful decision. (Smith 2008: 649-50)

So English education was established in India resulting in the opening of schools and colleges and Western influence began its spread in Indian society and culture.

It was in 1835 at the time of all these changes in social policy that Lord Macaulay proclaimed his Minute on language and education in India which is important to mention here because of the effect these measure, attitudes and ideologies would later have on the development of Indian culture, economy, politics (which I will not go into in this thesis) and society. In a superior tone, Macaulay stated in his Minute,

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary or scientific information, and are, moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be effected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them. (Macaulay 1871: 91)

Sanskrit, the ancient sacred vernacular language of India, Arabic as well as Hindi or other Indian languages were considered inferior and of no value when compared to English, above all, but also to French, Italian or German. The literature of India, which Macaulay assumed as being mostly poetry, was also of little or no use or value to the world. It was important, therefore, to educate the Indian elite, who had already been introduced to the English language, through the changes in the administrative system.

I am quite ready to take the Orient al learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Orient al plan of education. (Macaulay 1871: 91)

There was a certain patriotism or nationalism in the British ideal of spreading "Britishness" in India as in other colonies (Metcalf) so the educational reforms resulted in a new class of Indian men, especially, which would have made the British colonials feel proud. It was an emerging Indian middle class who wanted to learn not only English language, literature and Western science, but also to understand the British ways. These measures and policies, connected to philosophical and ideological thought of the time would affect all of Indian society, culture and economics from henceforth.

Much of the Indian elite came to refute the teaching of vernacular languages altogether, though some did still support the idea of teaching in both systems. But there were also scholars such as Sir William Jones who were fascinated with ancient Indian culture, literature, and Sanskrit and genuinely defended the preservation of local languages and culture. However, leading philosophers of the time, back in Britain, including James Mill and his son John Stuart Mill with their utilitarian principles believed that implementing the English curriculum in India implied an advance or development of the people and the society towards civilization.

Indian public opinion, if it was ever considered, was manipulated, as was justification for imperial subordination of the Indian people in the name of the Enlightenment project. Though the ideals of the Enlightenment embraced respect for all cultures of the world, it was simultaneously and conveniently assumed that the learning of Western science, languages and literature was the only guarantee of development towards a civilized in India. Macaulay argued that no man could possibly want to learn a language, 'science', philosophy or literature, which not only acknowledged and accepted superstitious fallacies, but would also be the object of laughter and mockery if taught at British "girls'" schools. On the other hand, English language and learning was the instruction that Indians must aspire to and desire as it was the language of their future, and the only way to also evolve from 'Oriental despotism' which was believed to be the system of land administration in India. The study of ancient Indian texts by scholars such as Sir William Jones would prove contrariwise. However, at the time, the most influential opinions stated that India would benefit at every level with these reforms: the educational level of the people would rise, a more just social policy would

develop and a deeper understanding of land administration and commerce would eventually provide the nation with the advances it needed.

> In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. […] Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects. (Macaulay 1871: 93)

India was in the hands of the British, who justified their imperial actions and interests through Orientalism and the Enlightenment project of bringing civilization and improvements to the quality of life in India and for its people. The Brahmins, who ranked highest in category within the caste system helped in the empowerment of British presence and ideology in India. It was through them that an understanding of Hindu ancient laws of society, justice, religion and land administration were constructed and used in the manipulation of the people. And while being eased into a position of power in British affairs in India, though they may have been reluctant at times with some of the decisions, especially those which classified Hinduism as one of idolatry and superstition rather than as a system which defined social and political structures, the Brahmins accepted the benefits of their privileged position. Knowledge of Indian culture and people was kept to a basic level to justify imperial interests. But though the advantages of this relation of power in the 18th and 19th centuries inevitably pended towards the British, India's history was being edified and benefits for the people of India would in time become evident.

> Yet the Orientalist project as it emerged was clearly fitted to the needs of Europe. Classification always carried with it a presumption of hierarchy. Jones, perhaps more than most, was drawn to a sympathetic understanding of Hinduism, yet even his enthusiasm for things Indian excluded the most recent centuries of its history, perhaps one might even say, the thousand and more years that had elapsed since antiquity. At best, in his view, contemporary Indians might be living relics of pagan antiquity, 'adorers of those very deities who were worshipped under different names in old Greece and Italy'. The glories of the 'golden age' had of necessity to be located in the most distant past. Such ideas were not wholly a European invention, for Indian cosmology itself was built upon a conception of decline, albeit cyclical in character, to a contemporary kaliyuga. But India

was for Jones always, despite his appreciation of its 'many beauties', the 'handmaid' of a transcendently 'majestick' Europe. Asian learning, he insisted, could supply many 'valuable hints' for 'our own improvement and advantage'. Europe's 'superior advancement in all kinds of useful knowledge' nevertheless remained unquestioned. (Metcalf 2007:14-15)

In Marxist terms India had not achieved a state of politicization, of social, economic and class consciousness as a nation or group whereby it would be able to overturn the colonial system imposed on them over the centuries and now with the British and bring about the needed change. The nation as an entity did not exist so was not able to stand as a representative of its own people against a dominant system. It was perhaps, not even altogether conscious of the colonial structures that were being imposed upon its ancient system of language, religion and society. It is this consciousness, when developed in a subject that allows it freedom of thought and action. Until the moment of awakening, of stepping out of alienation, the power, to categorize, to interpret and to attribute form to a culture lay in European thought.

John Stuart Mill, like his father, saw India as a backward society, stagnated in its progress and incapable of evolving on its own. British presence, law, instruction and order was fundamental in the development of Indian society.

Among the 'Orient al races', in Mill's view, only the Jews escaped this enduring stagnation, and they only because the existence of a line of 'Prophets' kept alive among them 'the antagonism of influences which is the only real security for continued progress'. Elsewhere, since improvement could not come from within, it had to be 'superinduced from without', by a government of leading strings' that could break down old institutions. (Metcalf 2007:32)

In Mill's utilitarian perspective, Britain's role was to help guide India onto the path where it could eventually 'look after itself'. Civilization and culture resided in European nations, and all other nations of the world had to be pulled along in order to achieve this state as well.

Hence the liberal set out, on the basis of this shared humanity, to turn the Indian into an Englishman; or, as Macaulay described it in his 1835 Minute on Education, to create not just a class of Indians educated in the English language, who might assist the British in ruling India, but one 'English in taste, in opinions, in morals

and in intellect'. The fulfillment of the British connection with India involved, then, nothing less than the complete transformation of India's culture and society. Its outcome would be the creation of an India politically independent, but one that embodied an 'imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws' (Metcalf 2007: 34).

British intervention in Indian education had a powerful and lasting effect on Indian culture. On the one hand, the British general opinion maintained that Christian values, through the introduction of religion in the schools curricula, or in the type of education that would be established in India, should be kept separate from other instruction. On the other hand, European morals would be introduced through the teaching of English literature. Yet the teaching of Western literary standards would, along with other reforms and changes to society and how it was administered, bring about an awakening, the build-up of a socio-cultural revolution and the rising of a national consciousness leading to the independence and development of India as a nation.

It is from this scenario of colonialism that class consciousness in the "subaltern", to borrow from Spivak's terminology, emerges. When a group of people, united under a common sense of belonging or unity become aware of their absence in self-representation and consequently of their need to appropriate power as a nation and identity, they emerge as a class in Marxist terms. This consciousness is brought about through, as Spivak analyses, the contact between two distinct groups each representing a different angle of the relation of power within a specific historical moment. In the case of India, it was the colonial domination of Britain imposing structures on Indian society which introduced the necessary development and changes that would lead to national consciousness and the ability to overturn the state of affairs "transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility." (Spivak 1988:9)

India was a divided nation, as I have referred. Ethnically divided, divided by religion, by caste and class. It is possible that class consciousness alone might never have originated in India, especially in the peasants, or those occupying the lower groups in the caste hierarchy, or even the people as a mass moved by the will to overturn the Raj. The Mughal Empire did not clash as much with the already existing Indian indigenous identity to bring about a change in desire, but the British presence, the clash with European ways, the historical circumstances

and the awakening of a consciousness in Indian people, did. Consciousness in India, therefore emerged out of very specific political, economic and historical circumstances.

> Yet even as 'consciousness' is thus entertained as an indivisible self-proximate signified or ground, there is a force at work here which would contradict such metaphysics. For consciousness here is not consciousness-in-general, but a historicized political species thereof, subaltern consciousness. In a passage where 'transcendental' is used as 'transcending, because informing a hegemonic narrative' rather than in a strictly philosophical sense, Guha puts this admirably: 'Once a peasant rebellion has been assimilated to the career of the Raj, the nation or the people [the hegemonic narratives], it becomes easy for the historian to abdicate the responsibility he has of exploring and describing the consciousness specific to that rebellion and be content to ascribe to it a transcendental consciousness… representing them merely as instruments of some other will. (2.38) (Spivak 1988:11)

It is interesting to debate whether national and political awareness in India was motivated by the British as part of a bigger imperial project, but backfired in its objectives, attributing power to the people of India, or whether it emerged from a collective consciousness of the Indian people united in a common interest. And it is difficult, if not an impossible task, to determine how India's historical development would have differed had it not been for British presence, and the introduction of socially altering reforms in the 18th and 19th centuries. One can, however, assess the role of British cultural and political influence on India, its people and society according to how the nation progressed independently following decolonization. From my point of view there have been many positive outcomes for the nation.

Returning to national and political consciousness, it was in May 1857 that the first revolt took place in India, beginning in Bengal. As Metcalf describes, "landlords and peasants, princes and merchants, Hindus and Muslims, each for their own reasons threw off the British yoke and sought their own independence" (Metcalf 2007:43) Indians seemed to be united in the revolt despite social, religious and class differences.

Marxist theory seems to simultaneously endorse and critique imperial expansion. In the development of the capitalist system, a historical inevitability, there comes a point when overproduction is achieved. At this point it is necessary to move beyond borders in search of

new markets, expanding the state, its population, production and commerce to other lands. Marx saw beyond the European continent, societies organized according to the logic of the capitalist system such as India which he argued was structured within a feudal system. In India he observed, people lived and worked in communities where land ownership and social administration were governed by a feudal system. With the arrival of foreign colonial powers, this structure would eventually collapse, either through domination of the local people in charge of the land and production who would have to give up its ownership and the natural resources, accepting foreign goods for consumption, or through an introduction of foreign industrial and capitalist structures that would overturn traditional systems of production and distribution of the land introducing more modern industrial and technological advances to how the land and resources were worked.

The introduction of reforms and the profound and imposing nature of the contact of the British with the Indians however, had yet another result. It brought about a desire for change on the part of the Indians for the first time in their history united as a nation making their debut in revolution in 1857. According to Metcalf, "for the British the searing trauma of this revolt was but the first of a series of checks to the expectation of a slow but steady march of progress whose end point would be the triumph of liberal principles throughout the world." (Metcalf 2007:43) It was this move towards progress that would eventually escalate and result in the overturn of the ancient feudal system in India, and the British Empire and a turn to a new economic, social and cultural possibility for the future of India. But at the time, the British did not see the 'educated' Indian as a threat to their authority and power,

> In similar fashion the value of education remained unquestioned despite the trauma of the Mutiny. In part, of course, this was because the Western educated had remained loyal during the uprising. As the young Indian official George Campbell had appreciated as early as 1853, 'The classes most advanced in English education, and who talk like newspapers are not yet those from whom we have anything to fear; but on the contrary they are those who have gained everything by our rule, and whom neither interest nor inclination leads to deeds of daring involving any personal risk.' The challenge which the educated would pose to the Raj still lay in the future.[9] (Metcalf 2007:49)

[9] This quote by Metcalf includes a reference in a footnote which reads: "George Campbell, *India as It May Be* (London, 1853), p.410".

Ironically this challenge was endorsed and justified by the civilizing reforms of India and its people. Metcalf writes when discussing the utilitarian position of James Fitzjames Stephen responsible for the Indian Evidence Act of 1872[10] in regards to British reforms in India and the use of a powerful governing body and coercion to maintain order:

> As expressed in the coercive sanctions of law, force was not an evil, Stephen maintained, but a necessary element in the creation of a civilized social order. This insistence upon the civilizing power of law, sustained by the coercive power of the state, Stephen shared of course with liberal reformers from Bentham onwards. Like them too he saw the British as representatives of a 'belligerent civilization', whose rule over India found its justification in the 'superiority of the conquering race'. As he wrote, with an almost evangelical fervor, British power in India was 'like a vast bridge' over which an enormous multitude of human beings were passing from a 'dreary' land of 'cruel wars, ghastly superstitions, wasting plague and famine', on their way to a country 'orderly, peaceful, and industrious', and which might be the cradle of changes comparable to those 'which have formed the imperishable legacy to mankind of the Roman Empire'. (Metcalf 2007:57)

Marx too did not necessarily see colonialism and imperial expansion as a negative aspect of historical development, for India had been a society governed by the cruel caste division that no external or internal power had up until the British been able to abolish. In his 1853 article entitled "The British Rule in India" he describes the nature of Indian economy and society as composed of a backward domestic industry of "hand-weaving, hand-spinning and hand-tilling," which made families and communities self-supportive, but nevertheless "small semi-barbarian, semi-civilized communities" who, as a result of British economic and industrial influence were able to develop and "produce the greatest, and to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia." (170) Like John Mill, Marx defended that Indian society and economy had stopped in time. The arrival of foreign structures would lead to a class consciousness of the poorer classes, and the lower castes, and an overturn of the ancient system of administration. British presence in India, as he analysed led to the necessary changes in society and its systems and structures of production which enabled the nation to

[10] The Indian Evidence Act passed as law in 1872 was a significant change to the judicial system as it treated evidence in court as equal to all Indians regardless of class, caste or religion.

progress economically, socially and culturally. So an imperialist structure of expansion, motivated by political, commercial and economic interests would turn against itself in the creation of a new state with the potential for future development. And so Marx concludes his article on a bitter-sweet note,

> England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.
>
> Then, whatever bitterness the spectacle of the crumbling of an ancient world may have for our personal feelings, we have the right, in point of history, to exclaim with Goethe:
>
> "Sollte diese Qual uns quälen,
> Da sie unsre Lust vermehrt;
> Hat nicht Myriaden Seelen
> Timurs Herrschaft aufgezehrt?"[11] (Marx 1975:171)

The implementation of the British education system would lead to the same overturning social and cultural effects in India. Through the analysis of historical data, scholars and politicians placed their faith in applying the model of the British learning system to what they considered to be primitive societies. The attribution of a "Westernized" historical perspective to non-European nations became a fundamental process of 19th century academia. The rich variety of vernacular languages, literatures and traditions and the importance of teaching these was discarded by imperialist ideology through the political and economic interests of Britain over India.

> All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid and destructive as the successive action in Hindostan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his

[11] Translated in this edition as:
Should this torture then torment us
Since it brings us greater pleasure?
Were not through the rule of Timur
Souls devoured without measure?

old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of Hindoo, and separates Hindostan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history. (Marx 1975: 166-167)

The possibility of developing an educational system, including higher education through the dissemination and instruction of the Indian nation's culture and languages was achieved later already in the 20th century with the efforts of Rabindranath Tagore, along with others. But in the 19th Century, the 'Westernizing project' as so called in the *Oxford History of India*, was pursued mainly in education, but also in administration of the land, industry and political systems and "without it there could have been no Indian nation as we know it today" (Smith 2008: 718). And though learning through vernacular languages was to some extent maintained, it was a strategy to expand the spread of English education. The establishment of universities in various districts was also proposed as well as 'bi-lingual' schools. The idea was a transformation and development of the educational system in India from vernacular and indigenous to an imitation of the British one. Higher ranking positions in government, administration and in the courts were only available for those who had an English education. The authority attributed to the Brahmins and higher castes, who had already benefitted from a privileged role in the time of the Mughals also contributed to the implementation of the British educational system.

This vision for a civilizing project in India which came with imperial ideologies of the 19th century would eventually result in the rising of a new nation on the path towards progress: political, economic and cultural progress according to a European logic. This development would naturally follow but not without India first having to experience, as Marx termed it, a phase of misery, domination and subjection to a more powerful system of thought which would alter its social structures and system of beliefs through violent means. All in the name of progress, development and civilization in India. As Macaulay stated:

We are not without experience to guide us. History furnishes several analogous cases, and they all teach the same lesson. There are in modern times, to go no further, two memorable instances of a great impulse given to the mind of a whole society – of prejudices overthrown – of knowledge diffused – of taste

purified – of arts and sciences plauted in countries which had recently been ignorant and barbarous. (Macaulay 1871: 94)

Culture existed as part of a structure, possessed a universal logic and dialectic which absorbed all humanity and its subsequent actions. Philosophers of the Enlightenment believed all humans possessed the same capacity for development. The cultural stage at which a particular group of people or nation found itself defined its level of development along the evolutionary and civilizational scale. European civilization measured itself and its stage of development according to its capacity for reason, its ability to reflect on humanity in scientific and philosophical terms. Contact with indigenous peoples and the witnessing of different social practices, cultural expressions and interactions provoked bewilderment on the civilizational crevice that existed between Europe and the African, Asian and American continents to where imperial expansion had spread. The capacity to evolve and develop had not yet reached these continents and the natives that inhabited them. And the supremacy of the white European, who having developed the military, political and scientific means to overpower any other race of the world, inevitably meant the transformation, if not the destruction in many cases, of other cultures, who were not necessarily backward in their development, but who merely existed within a different cultural time frame.

In the European model, history was the science of recording the deeds and conquests of great civilizations. History understood as a science could be used as register of the evolutionary pattern in the development of mankind and society. Objective historical reasoning was perceived as a human capacity which was only possible in a civilized stage of human development. It was not the actions of men alone which determined the progressing and outcome of history, though great men were written about in historical texts. The actions and events which brought about important changes in the Western world, first occurring in Europe and then spreading to other continents were considered natural and inevitable steps in the history of mankind and civilization, as in the development of culture and cultures according to this pattern. This universal logic which defined the direction human development took was a fact of nature prior to man's existence and capacity to understand its working. This universal law, however, made sense within the European logic of the Enlightenment but had

no meaning to other non-European cultures whose systems, practices, knowledge and beliefs followed other religious, spiritual or philosophical guiding principles.

Human development, European thinking determined, would lead to class consciousness, political and social awareness and the need to reorganize society and its systems of administration. And in fact it did in India. Consciousness, according to both philosophers of the Enlightenment and Marxist thought, would develop in mankind at a specific point in history leading to an awakening of the senses and the capacity for rational thought. Consciousness in social and political systems would be a means to equality, universal reason and the threshold of civilization. But the awakening of consciousness in alienated groups whether in the working classes, the colonial subject or slaves would come as the result of systems of thought introduced or imposed by a dominant group. This too was an inevitable factor of history. The primitive "other" could only be released of its stagnation and propelled into development as a reflection of the European "self". Historical consciousness outside this imperial structure would never be achieved. Imperial expansion and domination, therefore, were necessary evils in the evolution of humanity as a whole to meet European civilizational standards. Whether this was the way to introduce civilization to non-European nations is a historical incognita. There is no scientific or other way of knowing how societies would have developed had they not been subjected to colonialism. Just as there is no way of objectively identifying to what extent what already existed was civilization in its own terms. Europeans did no more than impose their own model.

Consciousness in Marxist historical discourse was defined in economic terms and meant the realization of the working class of its need to rise against and to overpower capitalist structures. This moment in history would mark the end of inequality and of the working class as the dominated stratum of society and the creation of a classless world where everyone worked for the good of the state, and as equals. Marxism in its most orthodox reading seems to dismiss the place of the subaltern party in social and cultural categories such as gender, race and sexuality. Its formula also seems to be valid for Western capitalist structures whose division was based on class – economic and social differences. However, the general theory contributes towards the understanding of world history from the 18th through to the late 20th century. Following Marxist thought a scientific pattern can be established for the development

of societies within a global economic trend. Greed is an innate human characteristic, and the possibility of economic growth and expansion only meant power on a global scale. Europe provided the model that defined the rules for power. The rest of the world had to be sharp enough to follow in its path towards grandness.

Social and political development was possible as envisioned within the concept of a universal truth. The final aim of universal development was to achieve a state of authority of the self which guaranteed political, social and economic freedom not only for humanity as a whole but for nations of the world and consequently for the individual as well. History defined a pattern of development in which men as individuals were passive agents of change acting according to a universal logic. In order to reach this state it was necessary for humankind to develop the capability to act according to the universal logic, as also to acquire the knowledge necessary for analysing historical processes. But, despite the reasoning behind 19th century philosophical dialectic, both processes required some level of individual cognition, interpretation and action.

According to Sartre, individual action and history did not have to exist independently of each other or simultaneously efface each other. Individual consciousness of existence and freedom of thought and action were important and essential factors in the construction of history. Universal history was composed of the piecing together of individual existences which contributed to collective realities which in turn resulted in defining a historical process.

It is this process of the piecing together of information, of gathering different and neverending perspectives, multiple levels of understanding and, the progress and changes involved in the reading of historical circumstances that I am concerned with in my argument for a new approach to historiography through fictional narratives. Reading and interpreting postcolonial novels in English opens up new possibilities for understanding history and how it may be represented. Attributing meaning to the complex whole of the postcolonial fictional narrative from form to content, to metaphor and language is an important step in the interpretation of historical processes and in the deciphering of what lay beneath the colonial structure and led to the conditions of postcolonialism.

In my argument in this thesis it is possible to use the postcolonial novel in English as a stepping stone to both a broader, as well as more specific reading of historical facts and

information. These narratives give us new perspectives on national history, on the effects of colonialism and decolonization, and they also help to understand social and cultural aspects that were subjected to transformations but which are not described first hand in traditional history, especially those written from Orientalist perspectives. The most minute of details found in the linguistic style of the narrative, in the characters, their story and interactions, and in the reconstruction of the general or specific past in a country's history is a fundamental piece in the understanding of not only national, but also world history for it helps in reconstructing a fuller picture of the processes that resulted in the world as we know it today. Furthermore, and to conclude this thought, postcolonial narratives and understanding their structures, meaning and function (which is not purely aesthetic) is an important step to the development of scientific thought on patterns of natural, social and economic evolution.

The voiceless subjects of history

In *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy's characters are the small pieces that compose the larger story. They are steering their existences beyond the border lines of their local cultural logic only to find themselves displaced, and incapable of controlling their descent into nothingness. This nothingness that I here mention is the process by which historical perspectives have tended to ignore or forget the majority of the subjects which contributed towards its unfolding process. This is because those individuals, communities or minorities which were considered as being of no relevance to general historical writing, as their traditional knowledge of the world was not seen as scientific, are left behind, unaccounted for and buried in time, taking their cultural past with them into their grave. Leaving no traces, no authentic historical perspective, because they do not matter. Chacko mentions this fact in *The God of Small Things*. Historical relevance or irrelevance has been defined by a specific stratum of society for others whose individual fate, social and cultural identity and role in national and historical process has been predetermined as meaningless. These subjects that I am referring to are those who are (or once were depending on each specific case of the 'voiceless') unable to speak for themselves. Social groups such as the

untouchables in India, women, children, the lower social classes, minority ethnic, religious or sexually defined groups. These groups, or at least some, especially those relevant to the case of India, are represented in Roy and Desai's novels through the different characters in the story. The role they play in the narrative is a metaphor for the social reality of the nation and culture. In both novels, class and caste differences are represented through the characters which I will be discussing throughout this thesis, of the judge and the cook, as well as through Sai and Gyan (*TIL*); Pappachi, Mammachi, and their close kin as opposed to Velutha, his father and brother (*TGST*); the women of different generations through Sai, Noni and Nimi *(TIL),* Ammu, Rahel, Baby Kochama and Mammachi *(TGST),* and the diasporic subject through the characters of Biju *(TIL)* Ammu and Rahel *(TGST).* These are fictional representations of characters who were denied a voice in both national and world history, but gain a place on the world map and are able to re-appropriate their history through fiction.

The individual actions and ideas of these voiceless characters were not considered relevant in the understanding of the grand events and changes in the course of history and its processes. Every strand of society, however, no matter how much conventional history has succeeded in dismissing its role, or how inferior it has been considered in the eye of the elite thinkers responsible for decision making in the past centuries, all social groups with their individual characteristics and experiences have contributed to the shaping of a nation's history, identity and culture. The democratization of historical processes and acknowledging of a culturally and socially diverse past, whether done in retrospect, or through the formal recording of oral (his)stories that have been passed down over generations or even through the authority now attributed to fiction results in the reordering of meanings, in the humanizing of the scientific and purely academic understanding of history, and in the fuller understanding of a nation's development. In Roy's novel, as Aikant has observed on Rushkin's *A Flight of Pigeons* "History is not merely a backdrop in this novella, certainly not in terms of generalized or abstract statements involving faceless men and women. It is, rather, a story recounted in subjective and human terms." (Aikant 2012:111)

History must be understood, interpreted and studied through a general underlying logic of equal perspectives, applied to the world today regardless of social, cultural and civilizational differences. But applying a universal idea of history to the world is a complex

and generalizing endeavour, a reductive exercise for a map of cultural diversity. The formation of nations and the historical processes that result in the world as it is known today may have been originated by Occidental imperial and expansionist interests, but led to the writing of new histories that rely on a reversal of the perspective through a different language of power, a different structure and different philosophical interpretations of individual, collective or even metaphysical realities. The history of the world rather than being understood as a universal discourse following a Westernized logic, is a breaking down of multiple, distinct, equally relevant and intersecting histories attached to a unifying core. Though history described the temporal unfolding of processes it is now open to new readings and new perspectives on the development of people, cultures, nations and the world. This 'timeline' which was the rational and ideological recording of the past by European intellectuals in their attempt to control and command the history of world, defining power and authority in this way has, since the official ending of the colonial era, been fed and re-constructed according to different sources, perspectives and layers supported by the social, cultural and political revolutions that took place in the second half of the 20th Century as well as by changes in the global economy. A neo-Marxist approach to history has restructured 20th and subsequently 21st century thought. In the words of Bruce King,

> The model of decolonization set in motion a wave of micronationalisms and liberation movements, such as Black Power and feminism, within nations, which was encouraged by the counter-culture of the 1960s and supported by deconstructivist versions of Marxist analysis and their offshoots. The various strands of cultural assertion, liberation, and social criticism remained twined in post-colonial studies long after decolonization had been overtaken by a larger historical movement of which it was a part, the globalization of the world's economy, communications, transportation, education, and the internationalization of modern technology. The accompanying rise in the standard of living, wealth, and health was led by an American liberal ideology of free trade in contrast to imperial and other protectionist systems. During this time English became the world's language while the culture of the Anglophone world became dominant in what V. S. Naipaul termed 'Our Universal Civilization'. The internationalization of English literature is part of a liberalism which reappears in varied and unexpected shapes, whether in notions of decolonization or free trade. It aims at a universalism. If the imaginative construction of a nation includes race and ethnicity, the change of 'British' form white to multiracial is part of a modernization brought about by free-market economics and culture. (King 2004:323)

Coming to terms with the understanding of difference not necessarily as a phenomenon of civilization but realizing that difference had a cultural and biological dimension which should be understood locally first, rather than through the imposition of a universal formula, created a problem in Western thought and logic. On the one hand, there was a need to dominate, and subjugate this difference and appropriate it in relation to the core self, within a Eurocentric vision of the world. On the other hand there was a fascination with this cultural difference, with the so-called "exotic" which nourished the imagination of European travellers, motivated its study and consequently the exploitation and destruction of its genuine essence[12], but which nonetheless took advantage of its benefits. So much so that in the 21st century, with globalization, the world has become one homogenized space where difference is easily accessible, fashionable and gains political or cultural relevance when ideology as a trend speaks louder than economic interests. It was through imperial expansion that Asia and Africa were dominated and appropriated within European standards and reorganized, though never really acknowledged, respected or understood according to this ideological perspective. Colonized peoples and their territories were placed on a primordial level on the timeline of civilization and world history, designed by European minds and based on their perception on how to characterize and classify individuals and nations. Those categorized as lacking civilization, and an objective notion of their own historical past, were blatantly and radically ignored, destroyed and discredited by a majority in power.

It can be argued that to be included in Western history meant cooperating with the general philosophical and ideological scheme and recreating an identity through Eurocentric standards. To remain apart would have implied the will to preserve a detached, primitive, but assumed original state. Military and political circumstances that governed the centuries of imperial expansion made it historically impossible to resist and fight European domination. As Robert Young argued, "History is the realm of violence and war; it constitutes another form by which the other is appropriated into the same. For the other to remain other it must not derive its meaning from History but must instead have a separate time which differs from

[12] A genuine identity, sociocultural behaviour or a natural practice is something an outsider never gets to really know, see or experience because from the moment it becomes an object of study or observation, culture becomes a performance. Furthermore, contact with a foreign subject, especially a dominant one, such as in the case of a colonizer will cause disruption, bring about transformation and awaken an awareness to the individual and collective. I will discuss this further in the chapter on ethnography.

historical time" (Young 2004: 47). Western dialectics and philosophical conception of history presuppose human action, resistance and the natural and equal interaction between the European and the other. This instant relation of power and hierarchy resulted in violence and subjugation, and failed to account for difference as a universal essence of mankind. The darker skinned African, Asian, Polynesian, Caribbean or indigenous human was judged, classified and treated according to a white, European logic of superiority over other races. Difference as a significant, natural and necessary aspect of human development was deemed as irrelevant as there was considered to be an underlying unifying nature in all of mankind which only made sense through a civilizing mission based on a Western logic. Nature, and culture as a social representation of the natural world was violated and trodden on.

Western culture was defined through the philosophical thought, political ideology and academic research and through different artistic manifestations such as literature, music, dance, art and architecture being produced in Europe. But colonized people also had their culture, administration, system of beliefs and knowledge, as well as artistic forms of expression. And prior to the assimilation into Indian culture of European cultural forms such as the novel besides those social and cultural aspects mentioned above, there were also other manifestations and practices which if recognized could have helped to realize that those being colonized had a socio-cultural system through which their life cycles and daily practices were structured. These other narrative forms came to be later identified, recognized and acknowledged, besides Indian cultural forms, also as being expressions of reaction and resistance to internal and external realities. Examples of these other narratives are the rituals of all kinds, the treatment of illness, religious practices, story-telling, the relationship with the land and nature, as others. Anthropologists dedicated themselves to observing, studying and recording the practices of tribal communities, but their ethnographies though valuable in the understanding of humankind were nevertheless interpretations of another culture, of exotic, sometimes barbarous practices and rituals, isolated fragments as cultural metaphors. Once more it was a European perspective of the world. Nothing would change this unless Western academia shifted in its perspective, or there was a revolution from within and the indigenous, the colonized or the subaltern took command of their own ethnographies, their own histories, through the writing of their own narratives.

Traditional Western forms dominated in the 18th and most of the 19th centuries, so history as a science, as well as travelogues, ethnographies, illustrations, and other scientific writing, and even legal documents created a colonial ideal of the 'other' that would later be recreated by that very 'other' through their personal narratives as new histories, political and cultural statements. Historical circumstance as an overpowering force that determined the path towards civilization would symbolically mark the birth of a more detailed and embracing history expressed in varied, personal, meaningful, sometimes violent and imaginative forms.

British imperialism was closely tied in with commercial and economic interests, but was also embedded in a civilizing Christian mission of extending Victorian values to the colonies. Leading name in current postcolonial theory, Elleke Boehmer argues that Eric Hobsbawm, one of the most important historians of Modern European history, identified different epochs of imperial expansion. In his view, the period which marks the beginning of British official presence as a dominating nation in India preceded the capitalist expansionist phase, the real period of British imperialism. Other historians, such as Bayly, mentioned in Boehmer's discussion, understood that imperialism had actually begun in the 18th century, "Some one hundred years before the Partition of Africa, colonial policy in Asia was aggressive, ideological, and imbued with a sense of nationalism and Christian mission, in other words, it prefigured formal imperialism" (Boehmer 2005: 29) and this phase was not so different from later stages in British imperialism. The main argument here was on the nature of motivation behind imperial expansion in India. Racial superiority was a big issue in the Victorian period and also a factor that endorsed colonial power contributing to further debates among historians on Britain's main interest in colonizing India:

> As the Robinson and Gallagher controversy highlighted, differences also exist among historians over the Empire's motivating forces, about the primacy of economic over strategic or political factors, for example, or the relative importance of ideologies of racial superiority when compared, say, to the motivating force of Great Power competition. (Boehmer 2005:29)

British interests in Asia were most possibly characterized by a combination of factors. Excessive nationalism, a superiority complex, commercial interests and the desire for territorial expansion were all motivating factors.

In brief, Victorian high imperialism was distinguished by the following: geographic magnitude; the mass organization and institutionalization of colonial power, often expressed in forms of aggressive nationalism; and, as the century matured, the formalization of imperialist ideologies, especially those pertaining to race, encouraged by the spread of Darwinist thought. (Boehmer 2005:31)

The British colonizing and expansionist missions of formal imperialism were integrated into a 19th century logic of a period marked by economic expansion, and ideological ideals that were based on white, European, Christian, and Victorian values in support for imperial rule abroad and defining mentalities and beliefs at home. It was possible that the majority of Britons supported and believed in the imperial project,

Imperialism, therefore, was not something that took place only abroad. The nationalism the Empire generated, the race antipathies it provoked, played a crucial part in British society, in particular in creating strategic solidarities within the country. National selfhood in Britain had traditionally been forged in opposition to an other overseas. But whereas in 1688 this other was Catholic Europe, increasingly, as the Empire grew, identity was defined as against the inferior state of being which the colonized were said to represent. Broader imperial identity, superimposed on older regional identities and bracketing together different class groups, was reinforced by social stratification in the colonies, where class and racial divisions often coincided. (Boehmer 2005: 31)

Racial supremacy and intellectual authority were strong factors in support of imperial rule, and for a civilizing mission in India. There was a grand humanizing objective behind the role of the colonial power, one of elevating the colonized people, of developing the nation and land (as observed in the establishment of the extensive railway system in India), all this was cleverly weaved into the British society. There was also the firm belief that the colonies would provide a more stable lifestyle at home, in Britain through economic and political growth, as well as for those who immigrated to the colonies. Regardless of the supposed good intentions of the colonizers, imperial greed and expansion, especially in the case of India, may have been one of the most successful accidents of history, and one that led to the emergence of a new and increasingly powerful nation, and to the gradual end of the British Empire. Europe, more precisely, the white, upper class, intellectual male and all he represented, was

the centre of the world at all levels. The rest – female, coloured, working class, poor – were figuratively speaking in some cases, slaves to the system and in need of civilization, humanity, instruction, evolution, or not, whatever their possible function within a Eurocentric, imperial, Victorian, Enlightened society was believed to be.

The end of empire results from a gaining of consciousness among the subaltern, those who had always been left behind, had never been given a voice and who had been subjected to a violent state of inferiority and irrelevance as individuals and as possible agents of their own history. One such example were the women in India, and their condition as females in a patriarchal, conservative and highly ritualized society. British presence questioned, reacted against and even changed practices which had existed for centuries and were part of the Indian culture, religion and tradition.

The practice of certain Hindu rituals such as *sati*[13] was considered primitive, violent and barbaric by British officials, and the Brahmins who represented the highest rank of the ancient caste system and who were intentionally used in approval of British power, "were now seen as the corrupt agents of 'priest-craft' and institutional oppression to the common people." (Roberts 2012:96) This need to moralize was characteristic of the British civilizing mission in India and the British banned the practice of *sati* in 1829. This manoeuvre on the part of British officials can be summed up in Spivak's words in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as "*white men saving brown women from brown men*." (Spivak 1995:33) But, although the British were responsible for the official abolishing of this practice, it was up to the women to speak up and out for their identity, their beliefs and their feelings towards such a practice. How did the widows, Spivak asks, who were emulated on their husband's funeral pyre, formulate their narratives and through them begin the construction of a history for themselves?

On the one hand, these women are today nothing but a list of names on the East India Company police reports, and there is no way to fully comprehend what they felt on being sacrificed at their husband's funeral. On the other hand, there is the fundamentalist or more archaic traditional position, as described by Spivak, that claims "The women wanted to die,"[14]

[13] Sati was the ancient ritual sacrificing of a widow on the deceased husband's funeral pyre.
[14] idem

as it was part of their cultural and religious heritage. According to Spivak, it is possible to (re)construct a narrative for these women and to try to make sense of their history, their suffering; giving them a voice, even though officially they never had one. This is a step in the re-appropriation of history. But how is it done? In some cases, it was possible for the body exposed to pain and suffering, to be used as narrative, when the woman's voice can and could not make itself heard. In Anita Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) Anamika, a beautiful, intelligent girl is denied the opportunity to study at Oxford with a scholarship she has received because her role as an Indian woman is to marry. Her parents, however, proud of her achievement, keep the letter of acceptance to Oxford locked away and only bring it out to entice potential marital candidates or to show visitors. "The visitors would congratulate Anamika and she would look down at her lap and play with the end of her braid and say nothing at all. She could never bring herself to contradict her parents or cause them grief" (Desai: 69). Anamika, being female, subjected to an arranged marriage, unable to pursue her dream of going to college in the UK and forced into a life she did not want, had no voice.

Women, just as other social individuals and groups, are subjects, often victims of historical circumstance, governed by strong political, cultural, social and religious structures, unable to resist or fight their fate. Anamika, like other women in history, did not have a voice, her desire or feelings were never uttered, and even if circumstances had given them the opportunity to somehow react, social or worldly structures had not yet provided the right space for these voices to be heard and acknowledged. Anamika sets fire to herself one early morning and while everyone around her gave an opinion on why she would do such a horrifying thing to herself, she was no longer able to speak for herself. It was her burnt body that exposed and expressed her narrative of resistance, pain and suffering. She "attempted to 'speak' by turning her body into a text of woman/writing" (Spivak 2005: 35).[15]

But it would still take some time before these narratives could be understood and before any form of personal manifestation could be considered relevant in the construction of a more complete and democratic understanding of Indian history. The general

[15] In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak uses the incident of Bhabaneswari Bhaduri, a middle class unmarried young woman of about 16 or 17 who hanged herself in Calcutta in 1926. Spivak analyses her suicide as a form of speaking out for the ritual of sati. The woman was menstruating at the time of her death, a physiological state which is considered impure at the time of sati and reason to postpone the ritual until the fourth day of menstruation. This, Spivak claims was a form of protest on the part of the girl.

institutionalized belief was that Indian society and culture was inferior to that of the British, just as local knowledge irrelevant to the advance of the human intellect in European terms, the terms which governed the world. But there were those scholars who were interested in India, its culture, languages, practices and knowledge and they too had an important opposing voice at some points, but not always enough power to work against the system, as they too depended on the imperial project for their own survival.

As Sanjiv Roberts has argued in his essay, "From Indomania to Indophobia", British relations with India went from Indomania with Sir William Jones' fascination with Hinduism and Sanskrit, linking these ancient traditions with Christianity and European languages, to a fear of Oriental practices and any possible association they could be found to have with European or Christian practices. Sir William Jones equated Indian poets with Shakespeare, claimed that Indian knowledge of astronomy was well advanced and found in ancient Indian philosophy ideas which were very close to those of the European thinkers of the time. This fear of knowledge that could arise from Asian nations invading European thought and principles resulted in respected intellectuals like the philosopher James Mill making statements such as:

> It was unfortunate that a mind so pure, so warm in the pursuit of truth, and so devoted to Orient al learning, as that of Sir William Jones, should have adopted the hypothesis of a high state of civilization in the principal countries of Asia. […] Besides the illusions with which the fancy magnifies the importance of a favourite pursuit, Sir William was actuated by the virtuous design of exalting the Hindus in the eyes of their European masters […] (Mill 1975:227-8)

And Mill goes on in his *The History of British India* to describe Hindu society, culture and administration as backward, superstitious and inferior in comparison to other civilizations. Civilization, he claimed was a concept which was wrongly applied to most nations at any state of development, but how could the Hindus be considered a civilization when they were so primitive in thought?

There could be no other or a non-self beyond the [European ideal of] self just like there could be no alternatives or branches to the structure or the system that defined the world, universal reason and to the institutionalized formula for human existence. This notion of the

self, reason and the core of the world resided in Europe. The claim that there was a universal truth emerged from a central brain called Europe which not only existed as the core of humanity and the world, but also had as a starting principle the fact that there was no other possible interpretation of the world and truth besides the one that had originated from the "centre".

These strongly held beliefs were the underlying principles of the practice and implementation of certain behaviours and thoughts during the colonial period that led to the expansion of European political power and territory, mainly British, French, Belgian, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian, beyond national and continental borders into new continents. This expansion although territorial in nature, turned out to be more than just the stretching of borders and therefore political power. The discovery and encounter of difference was settled by the need to introduce and instruct people of other lands, traditions and language systems into the European, civilized, universal way of truth.

The effect this colonial enterprise had on foreign, non-European lands which were considered by many as backward, savage, uncivilized, primitive, ignorant, etc, may have lacked the respect and real "humanism" that all people of whatever skin colour, traditions and language deserve, but I will argue that although, when the time was right for revolt, this imposition of European values was met with resistance, at times violent,[16] the encounter of cultures did have many interesting and positive outcomes.

> It is often contended that forcing Western ideas on an Eastern people fundamentally backfired, and the 'divide and conquer' tactics employed by the British in India ultimately sowed the seeds of rebellion. What happened was, understandably, a direct consequence of the imposition of British rule and cultural practices that were largely incompatible with native culture, not yet exposed to European modernity. (Aitkan 2012: 104)

Direct and personal contact with a foreign culture which penetrated its very pores of native existence, led the Indian people at all levels – individual, collective and nationally to

[16] The 1857 Sepoy Mutiny is a case of revolt on the part of the Indian colonial subjects. As Aikant maintains, this term is unrepresentative of the actual events as it was not one collective, organized revolt, but the coming together of many, individual or grouped, disperse uprisings occurring for different reasons.

reevaluate their position and to rebel against the dominant power to which they were being subjected. It opened the door for new forms of expression, new forms of resistance and the space for new narratives.

Marxist theory has been extended beyond the socio-economic analysis of class and society. Given a cultural perspective, Marxism can be stretched to include all minorities or social groups we know of today and not just the working class in Europe. The effects of the socialist revolution had, and in a sense continue to have, a powerful cultural dimension as well, which is nonetheless related with the economic and political circumstances that govern societies. Economic forces, when closely analysed are the most powerful and moving factor in the history and evolution of mankind, at all levels. Everything that happened along the course of the development of mankind and society was directly related to and a consequence of the emergence of the capitalist system, the development from its early form through the rise of industry and the technological revolution, and its inevitable reversal. Cultures and cultural expression in colonized (indigenous) people also lost their purity in a sense, with the arrival of the Europeans when cultural production became inseparable from the economy. Perhaps, through Marxist theory there is a formula that can be applied to all systems alike reducing the world in its essence to a structure that moves, even though at different rhythms, in the same direction and evermore towards a final goal. The world, typically characterized by difference and therefore inequalities in the systems determined by political ideologies, regains meaning and order through the loss of original meaning and order.

The colonized subject as agent of change

Returning to India and its colonial experience, there are few authentic records that reveal what the Indian felt about the arrival, presence and activities of the British on their land. Colonial expansion involves the arrogant assumption that one nation has the political power and authority to take over another's, which at the time is not even considered a structured nation. Regardless of the fact that the very concept of nation is a Western construction. Natives of the lands that were occupied by European colonials had their way of

relating to the land and acknowledging their rightful ownership. Colonial expansion and practices applied to a 'new' land included the assumed and official freedom to use, trade and exploit people as labour, local resources and the establishment of a commercial enterprise for the creation and increase of the national wealth of the colonial power. It also generally involved the rejection of local social structures, traditions, languages, art and beliefs as valid cultural or political forms, denying local or indigenous people any form of authority. The implementation of the dominant power's language, laws and practices was imposed and most of the time subjection and acceptance was the natural and expected reaction on the part of the dominated group. Resistance and refusal, or plain incomprehension of the new rules and system were met with violence and oppression.

A reversal of power relations was impossible in Imperial times. However, had there been a formal and universally recognized account of how the Europeans colonizers, their knowledge and laws were perceived by the Indian people during colonial times, British Raj power relations might have been different, even more balanced. Had British and Indian knowledge and systems been placed on equal terms and in a comparative perspective to each as an encounter of equals, then many debates would certainly have arisen on the superiority and authority of one nation and structured system over another. But politically and historically this was only made possible when the moment arrived and the process of decolonization and independence was set in motion. At this point in history Western forms were or had already been adopted and were rooting themselves in other cultures. There was no longer any possibility for the speaking out or a writing of a narrative in an original, authentic, and untouched voice or even language. There was however, the possibility to rediscover a nation, its people and culture, through narratives of resistance, through an appropriation of the past and through a new hybridity which defined itself according to a global dialectic of social, cultural and economic development.

Culturally, nations that were subjects of imperial domination only gained an audible voice when they began speaking in the language of their colonizers. Curiously, adapting a language that was once imposed on them became their way of freeing themselves from the state of subjection and gave them the power to express what they had always felt but had

never before been heard. This gave way to a new historical and cultural process, the re-appropriation of history and culture, through a new narrative voice and form.

Orientalist theory claims that knowledge is always marked by the socio-cultural and political circumstance of those who produce it. In order to analyse, understand and interpret the object of study, one will naturally always approach it through a previously formulated idea. Ideas, theories, conceptions on the 'other', no matter how scientific the method used is, are always articulated through previously established codes. Even today, in the 21st century it is hard to break free of this habit. It is how stereotypes are produced and maintained. Going by this premise, it is a very difficult intellectual and empirical task for the (social) scientist or analyst to study an object and be free of circumstantial – theoretical, political or academic - objectivity or individual subjectivity, whatever the perspective may be. Furthermore, interpretation and analysis is, generally speaking, instrumental in its aims. Expanding knowledge on a specific object of study may be pursued for power objectives or to aid in the understanding of other related objects, which again is always connected to some politicized trend. And although interpretation and purpose in study may have idiosyncratic differences and individual variables related to personal motivation, it is generally related to national or globally directed interests.

> Here signs are set in various and contingent relationships according to people's instrumental purposes – purposes of course that are socially constituted even as they may be individually variable. Signs thus take on functional and implicational values in a project of action, not merely the mutual determinations of a synchronic state. They are subjected to analysis and recombination, from which arise unprecedented forms and meanings (metaphors, for example). (Sahlins 1995:5) [17]

The Orient was a geographical and cultural reality much before the Europeans arrived. It is wrong to assume that it was a creation of Occidental imagination and fascination with the exotic other, as Said has also argued. Knowledge the world has of the Orient, however, was undeniably a product of Western thought, observation, manipulation and fantasy. All

[17] Marshall Sahlins, American 20th century anthropologist is best known for his study of Captain Cook arrival in Hawaii in the early 19th century. Captain Cook was taken for the Hawaiian god Lono and his assassination during a revolt of the islanders was believed to be the sacrificial and ritual killing of Lono.

subsequent additions and contestations and reformulations were a reaction to the first encounters and writings on the 'other'. Orientalism served as a model for European thought on the Orient and a discourse of power which was used to dominate the Eastern colonies. India possessed its own narrative of the past, different to that which was common in European academia, but nevertheless valid in a world free of judgment, comparison and cultural oppositions. It also possessed a culture, languages, religions, knowledge and social structures. The codes and signs through which social interaction and knowledge of life in India were conducted existed outside the European systems of thought, and looking back today, with the development of social and cultural studies, they were a parallel understanding of the world and not one which was behind in the path towards civilization. In order to preserve knowledge of the world as such and for India to maintain its modes of existence as authentically theirs, it would have been necessary to keep it free of contact with foreign influences and as a consequence, awareness of historical time through first the imposition and later the exchange and appropriation of non-Indian, Western thought. In the case of India, though, the British were not the first encounter they had with either Europeans, or with an imperial foreign power. Other indigenous groups, such as the Hawaiians, for example had been untouched by foreign influence when the British first arrived. In this case the indigenous culture had existed beside the European historical ideals, judgement and interpretation, or independent of other imperial 'invaders'.

> It seemed that history had to be kept at a distance, lest "system" be put at risk. As I say, action entered into account only as it represented the working out of an established order, the "stereotypic reproduction" (Godelier's phrase) of existing cultural categories. This nonhistorical appropriation of action could be supported, moreover, by the sound argument that circumstances have no existence or effect in culture except as they are interpreted. And interpretation is, after all, classification within a given category. "It is not enough to say," the philosopher tells us, "that one is conscious *of* something; one is conscious of something as *being something*" (Percy 1958:638, emphases added). The percept becomes a fact of human consciousness – or at least of social communication – insofar as it is embedded in a concept of which the perceiver is not the author. The concept is motivated in the culture as constituted. (Sahlins 1995:7)

Now, it is not clear or possible to know today how the arrival of the Mughal empire or later and especially the arrival of the British was perceived and accepted within the Indian

cultural, religious and metaphorical understanding of its existence, as I previously referred. It is, however, possible to formulate an anthropological interpretation of the socio-cultural and political outcome of imperialism in India. Indian people gained consciousness of who they were as a nation and people, and how their being contrasted and compared with that of the British. But this consciousness was possible through a British narrative and not an Indian one. Regardless of the cultural processes by which Indians and their imperial "guests" conducted their cultural exchanges and fell into the colonial categories and code of conduct of domination and subjection, a new cultural consciousness was aroused. "Culture may set conditions to the historical process, so that history becomes the realization, in the form of society, of the actual resources people put into play." (Sahlins 1995:7) From a cultural perspective, the awakening of historical consciousness in Indian society set the mechanisms of change in motion. And this impulse changed the former characteristics of Indian society, culture and knowledge, giving way to a reordering of the local realities which would result even through the transformative process in what is acknowledged as the Indian (search for) identity. The encounter with the British provided a new self-consciousness for the Indian people, a new vision and expectation of structured systems of thought which came to be introduced into their national social, cultural and political system through the complicated processes of decolonization and the formation of an independent state. The universal logic that may be applied here is the fact that culture is an ongoing process and at every stage of its development what constitutes nation is inevitably tied to the social, cultural and political circumstances that move every individual in the production of a collective identity.

What we know today is what came to be known with decolonization and with the collapse of Western values and authority alone, and also untouched, as the only governing and structuring ideal. European encounters with the other resulted in changes, not only in the people, culture and systems of the colonies as in that of the colonizers as well. The imposition of Western cultural structures through colonialism led to the assimilation of foreign forms by colonial subjects but also opened up new knowledge and interest in a world beyond European structures and codes.

The appropriation of culture on either side of the colonial map made the production of new forms and new meanings possible. "The great challenge to an historical anthropology

is not merely to know how events are ordered by culture, but how, in that process, the culture is reordered. How does the reproduction of a structure become its transformation?" (Sahlins 1995:8) Cultural forms had existed in India, previous to British presence as I have already stated, but they were there independent of pre-established ideals on knowledge within a logic of difference and hierarchies governed by Eurocentric superiority of the time. Indian people practiced their socio-cultural habits and daily life in ignorance (in the purest sense of the word) of the fact their traditional system of beliefs and customs could be subject to interpretation and classification. Unaware also that they themselves would eventually be agents of changes in their systems. European thought was based on the ideal of civilization and a moral order so the encounter with other cultures considered primitive would not only empower European systems of thought, but also provoke profound transformations in society and culture as generalized concepts and ideals.

Indian culture had never been subject to reinterpretation nor to the circumstantial need for reordering or transformation by neither its own people, because these accepted practices as permanent, nor by foreigners prior to British presence. The introduction of British values, culture and structures led to interpretation and to classification which in turn led to a reinterpretation and a reversal of the logic by which society and culture were ordered. This was all circumstantial. The reversal of logic and the ability to use power for a common goal was made possible when the Indian people became aware of the structural principles that defined their existence in a world of binary oppositions. It was then that their culture and their unity as a nation was a transformative process in itself, but also used to transform the nation and its people through an understanding, appropriation and adaptation of forms and structures the British had brought with them.

> Basically, the idea is very simple. People act upon circumstances according to their own cultural presuppositions, the socially given categories of persons and things. As Durkheim said, the universe does not exist for people except as it is thought. On the other hand, it need not exist in the way they think. Nor need the response of the "generalized other" of human discourse, having also his or her own cultural standpoint, correspond to the suppositions of one's own intentions and conceptions. In general, then, the worldly circumstances of human action are under no inevitable obligation to conform to the categories by which certain people perceive them. In the event they do not, the received categories are potentially revalued

in practice, functionally redefined. According to the place of the received category in the cultural system as constituted, and the interests that have been affected, the system itself is more or less altered. At the extreme, what began as reproduction ends as transformation. (Sahlins 1995: 67)

History and historical processes, which according to structuralism are bound by an underlying logic, here assume the role as the motivators of change. From an anthropological point of view, colonizer and colonized are equal in their perception of the "other" and the cultural forms by which people conduct their lives are questioned and revalued on either side of the structure.

Social distinctions have existed in Indian society for centuries. The British were not responsible for the divisions brought on by the ancient caste system.[18] The arrival of the British however only reproduced and strengthened this hierarchy by adding more complexities to the structure, and even causing further divisions by privileging one side of the hierarchy in detriment of the other. But on the other hand it also raised awareness of the need to abolish this system as a formal structure. In Indian perception of social distinctions, perhaps the relation of colonial power and subjection that the British presence brought with it made sense within Indian social, cultural and religious logic. In a sense, the British did not disrupt how society was ordered, as social relations functioned according to the already existing logic of the social hierarchy. The term "Sahib", as stated by Lawrence (1997) has been recorded as the most spoken word in the "Anglo-Indian lexicon" which only emphasizes the relationship that was established between Indians and Britons. But the British made servants of Indians who had been born into a servant class and who lived, as their parents and grandparents as servants even for Indians. Indians, who were in a position of power, had to be treated differently. The British had to take care to respect their higher rank in the social hierarchy and find some way to share governance and authority with them.

The desire and attempt to recreate British society in Indian terms, and to impose British values, was accepted by Indians of all social levels as an extension of the already

[18] The ancient Hindu Caste system is divided into four groups: the Brahmins (the priestly orders), Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The lowest of all castes were the Untouchables, or Paravans, who in the 19th century came to known as "Dalit" and even developed their own literary movement and branch of Dalit feminism (K.A. Geetha 2012)

existing social structure in Indian society. Those who were of the elite classes had their social privileges, while those of the servant classes remained so. Rather than as a total re-structuring of social practices, the British colonial categories of social class further strengthened the Indian caste system. The caste system is an ancient one in India and society was organized, from status to marriages, to professions according to its laws. And though the British did attempt to do away with the harsh treatment of the untouchables, this was a society which was profoundly marked by these social and religious stigmas. With Independence, the new constitution determined the end of the caste system, but the social division and beliefs associated with it were so strong that this social division remains until today.

India is a nation of a mostly rural population. Distribution of wealth and privilege follow an ancient, in some ways perverse logic grounded in ancient customs and sacred beliefs but also linked to economic status and acquired power. Those who had access to education during the British Raj were mostly men of higher caste and class. These men were instructed in the English language, learnt a trade – many became doctors, judges, engineers – and were encouraged to study in Britain. Few women received higher education or spoke English, although there are well known female writers and poets[19] in India who write in both English and their vernacular language. The majority of the Indian population which was comprised of the peasant class had no access to education of any sort, privileges or the possibility of learning English, but those who did receive an education, and the generations that followed were raised and instructed in British standards. In *The Inheritance of Loss* the retired judge Jemubhai Patel who had studied in Britain is disgusted by his wife Nimi's inability to express herself in English. But Nimi, as the judge understands, could have learnt had she wanted to. "Nimi learned no English, and it was out of stubbornness the judge thought." (Desai 2006: 170)

So whereas the principles by which the British conducted their administration strengthened the Indian caste system by making those in higher social ranks feel more important, it also eventually created awareness of the multiple possibilities among those who had in the past been denied a chance at rising above their predetermined social role. So the role, duty and social obligations which those who were lower down in the hierarchical ladder,

[19] Just to name a few: Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Shashi Despande and Shobhaa De.

due to the uncontrolled result of caste, gender or circumstances of fate and chance, were subjected to were also brought into question. Poorer Indians, untouchables, ethnic groups, women and all those who had to conform to their social conditions, came to realize they too had the possibility to stand up for themselves and fight for a new India.

As I have previously mentioned, from an anthropological perspective the questioning of established forms took place on both ends of the colonial axis. Indians looked at themselves and their practices within the new logic of cultural exchange with the British. They analysed how they lived and how the British adapted their European values within their society. Those who were more favoured in the social hierarchy learnt English and began to practice their professions, trained in British institutions and in the British manner, and lived like the British upper class. Those who were less favoured such as the untouchables, women or less fortunate social stratum found ways of resistance and when opportunities emerged, such as the possibility to emigrate, they took advantage of these. But the British were also faced with new forms and possibilities for coexisting with each other and with the Indians. Spirituality, eroticism and the values of rank that they found in India aroused the composed minds of the Victorian gentry.

Many were taken over by the spirituality of Hinduism, and its masters, its temples, the deities and teachings. The much spoken about superstitious practices and beliefs of the Indian people was also a fascinating subject for many. Indians possessed an ancient knowledge of the universe, of health and healing and of spirituality which were not known or practiced in Europe, as Sir William Jones had discovered and endorsed. Or if they were, those who did practice them were considered witches and would have been burnt during the inquisition. India was also a land of architectural beauty and grandeur as a result of the treasures of its kings, Mughal emperors and the devotion to divinities. Furthermore, the Indian people were a constant source of fascination for both men and women due to their erotic practices.

In ancient Hindu tradition and wisdom, man had to live according to three main vital goals or principles; Dharma, Artha and Kama. These could be vaguely understood as duty, knowledge and pleasure. The Indian practice of eroticism fascinated British men and women who came from a society that judged sexual behaviour according to a strict morality and puritanism. To them, the notion of right and wrong or moral evaluation when it came to

pleasure was non-existent or irrelevant in Indian society. The involvement of British men with Indian women as well as the opposite, (though perhaps more secretive and forbidden[20]), was both tempting and dangerous. The social and sexual interaction of British and Indian men and women broke with the established codes that existed in both societies. And on either side of the cultural exchange it was viewed with suspicion and as a threat to the social order. Not only were cultural boundaries being overstepped, but also the kind of relations and social interactions that developed as a result of this forbidden mingling and coupling represented a reversal of the system and its established order.

British presence in India and the colonial circumstances that brought it on became a metaphor of change. Every aspect of the interaction between the British and the Indians represented a step closer to the realization that they, the colonials, were not necessarily superior, but that they merely possessed the power to acclaim themselves as superior. The awareness that this power was attainable was the key to unlocking history, and its firm structure, so as to broaden the possibilities that set the development of the world in motion. Whether politically and economically this development occurred in a just and democratic fashion is another debate altogether. My focus here is on the literary and cultural outcome of this imperial encounter and how it came to be expressed along the decades following decolonization with all the socio-cultural and economic factors that contributed to the world we know today.

The continued presence of a foreign body with foreign practices and beliefs, which according to a colonial logic considered themselves and established themselves as superior, shook the ancient system and created disruptions in how society had lived prior to its arrival. But the cultural mixing also brought on the knowledge that all cultures and structures are subjects and agents of change. The exchange of practices, interactions, the imposition of a foreign language and system and the invasion of positions of power led to the awakening of a social and national consciousness. This awakening was the beginning of the need to reorder how society had functioned until then. It happened so because whereas ignorance and innocence had prevailed within the working of the system, the imposition and necessary

[20] The relationship between English women and Indian men and the problems that could occur from it is a fundamental part of the plot in E. M. Foster's 1924 classic novel *A Passage to India* as also in the 1984 film adaptation of the book by David Lean.

adoption of a new kind of knowledge not only awakened, but also strengthened a national consciousness.

Transformations and shifts in philosophical perspectives on history and culture

Throughout the 19th century there was a fascination with the documentation and representation of people, of historical or sacred figures, and of events. This representation took the form of the visual and plastic arts through painting, sculpture or architecture, through literature in all its forms and in music through grand compositions and masterpieces. Artistic masterpieces and works of art in general defined and aimed at an interpretation of the world expressed in many forms. Despite the variety of artistic representations of historical events, mythologies, humans and nature all these forms were linked to a philosophical system or what also came to be termed as movements. Likewise, history as the science of writing about the world, and its progress through time was inseparable from a cultural and philosophical logic. All the artistic, cultural and factual representations of life were fundamental forms which created a sense of order and structure in the understanding of the world.[21]

Historical records and the underlying philosophical systems of thought that simultaneously guided and analysed the processes of change in the world were fundamental to a structured understanding of a nation's past, present and future within a broader universal system of development. Moving further back into the 18th century, with the dawn of the Enlightenment, historians had already began to search for patterns and structures in the study of past events and actions of men that might have governed the course of history. The conclusion these thinkers would eventually come to would be that what commanded the actions of men were ideas. Historical understanding went from the study of actions as what directed mankind to an understanding of thought and ideas within a cultural epoch as what determined the actions of men. History was not to be treated as an objective observation of actions purely and for the recording of events, but as the product of scientific and

[21] This is also true of how other symbols were also used an represented in art, such as religious, sexual or erotic, physiological or natural references and symbolism,

philosophical thought ruling over the procedures of men and subsequently nations. This takes us back to the discussion on Hegel's Absolute Spirit or the Universal Reason present in the consciousness of mankind, inherent in nature, in logic and which also determines the passing of time as seen through man's progress from the past to the present times.

> The Absolute is, rather, all of the categories of thought – and they are the categories of reality as well – all of the concepts which the mind can have, all of the intelligible structures of existence, no matter how contradictory to one another they might be when viewed abstractly, and it is all of those categories in a unity. (Mazzeo 1991: 382)

Following Hegel's idea of the Absolute, "Reason" was not a mental state inherent in European thought alone. It was common to all mankind equally regardless of conflicting categories of thought, since differing ideas could come into contact with each other and even clash or fail to recognize the other only to generate new possibilities, new spaces where new ideas were able to develop. Consequently, through the evolution and development of thought and reason, societies and cultures also progressed through to a supreme state of civilization, not in European terms, but in universally defined terms. It was this ability to cohabit within the same system of thought that made of the world a unit in philosophical thinking. The development of thought, ideas and as a consequence, modes of living through time was possible in the minds and reasoning of philosophers, scientists, and thinkers as they became aware of the Universal Reason and applied it to the benefit of mankind, as a whole.

> How then does this Absolute Spirit manifest itself in history? History, for Hegel, is nothing less than a progressive temporal revelation of the Absolute Spirit. Time or history is thus, to adapt a phrase of Plato's to our purpose, a moving image of eternity, and to understand history is to understand the unfolding of the thought of God. (Mazzeo 1991:382)

Hegel's is not an easy thought process. According to the German philosopher, ideas are what govern history and the way the world is viewed at a particular point of philosophical human disposition or perception. But these ideas may be preceded by actions or events. Any occurrence that meddles with the natural state of the world altering its course will come to be

adapted to the philosophical ideals. The Absolute Spirit or Reason is present in all of life and its manifestations, so even events that had not been predicted or planned were considered a natural movement towards the Absolute. It is however through thinking that actions and events are ordered according to the Spirit that generated these in such a way. Therefore the work of great thinkers and artists gave form to life through the expression of ideas in writing or art as the abstract, scientific and conceptual expressions of the Reason or Spirit that continuously governs life. "Indeed, the history of thought is the expression, in terms of ideas of cultural fact, of great forms or styles of life, of a finite number of paradigmatic modes of existence which incarnate the universal categories of thought and becoming." (Mazzeo 1991: 383)

The Absolute Spirit can be understood as a divine being or energy which governs mankind or it can also be understood as the cultural, scientific and intellectual body of thought governing the socio-political direction of any nation or society. Either way it is an overruling power either spiritual or political/economic. The acknowledgement of historical events and their subsequent understanding within a cultural and intellectual logic is identifying these moments in time as the outcome of specific cultural processes. The development or movement of these cultural processes which work as an underlying structure for thought and action through time is what defines history. The problem arises when this philosophical ideal is placed up against a non-European cultural system, by European minds.

A historian, according to E. H Carr, studies the past in the light of the present. Present circumstance, political interests, philosophical trends and social values are almost always present in a historian's interpretation of the past as factors influencing his/her analysis. So historical writing just as the science of history at different stages in the history of academic and philosophical thought has as much to say about the time when it is being written, about the historian and of the socio-cultural, political or national circumstances from which he/she stems as about the past that is being described.

Furthermore, history is interpretation and not just the telling and writing down of facts and events. Interpretation involves perspective and an ongoing dialogue between present and past, historian and object of study. A fact is real and it happened in such a way. But one person may give it importance while another may totally ignore it. The object of study becomes of

historical value when it is given historical depth and importance, and when it becomes essential in the construction of historical truth. And truth is valid for individuals or collectives according to different experiences and objectives. The pieces of information produced in the process of gathering historical detail and analysing it become the building blocks of history, used in the science of understanding humankind and its past, as well as to understand the present state of affairs for anyone person, community, society, nation or even the world as a unit.

Great thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries interpreted the world from a Eurocentric perspective. Europe, with its great composers, philosophers, scientists, artists, writers, explorers and navigators as well as royalty and nobility were the centre of the world. There was metaphysical quality about Europe's grandeur, and the elite that represented it, which transcended human natural action because the minds of great men were governed by the Absolute Spirit. It was difficult to acknowledge the role of individual thought, experience or creativity, just as it was impossible to articulate the notion of difference within this logic. Difference was in conflict with the self and would only inevitably have to be assumed as part of the Universal whole in order to be fully comprehended. This was the nature of the Spirit of the age.

The historian, therefore, was not only a medium through which historical facts were gathered and made available to others in the form of history. Historians were also creative interpreters of the past who had the ability to gather information and rearrange it so as to gain meaning within a cultural logic. The writing of history not only gained meaning within the culture from which it emerged, but was also a product of the culture that gave it life. It was a fundamental science of mankind for, through this academic, scientific and philosophical logic and its writing, the present with all it contained was recorded and kept for the future development of man, societies and the world. It was through the study and interpretation of the past that men would understand themselves, life and the world, and the interaction that existed between these three categories. According to philosophers of the time, humankind as a whole was equally capable of developing towards a civilized state, but historical records provided an interpretation and ordering of facts, events and ideas of this evolution, and subsequently portrayed the difference between the European man and the 'other' needing to

be colonized. The 'other' was generally disregarded as backward and primitive and so possessed no history of their own.

The understanding of humankind and its complex existence meant realizing that human beings as socio-cultural entities express themselves in different forms, which evolve when rearranged so as to create new forms of expression with the passing of time. It is the encounter of different forms of expression that may at times come into conflict with one another that leads to the emergence of new ideas. The fact that the colonial 'other' had no history in European terms was a white man's preconceived understanding of the world. Non-European people had their own systems of thought and their own approaches to an understanding of the world and the passing of time, an inevitable characteristic of all cultures. The contact with Europeans and European culture, and cultural forms, would only eventually lead to the creation of new hybrid and later assimilated indigenous forms. This is true even of national histories.

Primitive or more rural thought interpreted the passing of time as moving in cycles, because this was the reality that gave meaning to their lives and governed daily practices, fundamental for the continuation of life. It was day and night, the cycles of the moon, the coming and going of seasons, birth and death which defined the movement of time. Life was a myth of eternal return moving in incessant cycles. The terminal quality of death could be counteracted by the idea of reincarnation or the return of ancestral spirits in local mythologies. These notions of time and native interpretations of the world were not recognized by most historians, academics or philosophers as valid histories. They lacked structure and objectivity. "History begins when men begin to think of the passing of time in terms not of natural progress – the cycle of the seasons, the human life-span – but of a series of specific events in which men are consciously involved and which they can consciously influence" (Carr 1990:134). Prior to this happening a nation's or culture's history was enveloped in fantasy, religion, inseparable from the natural world, lacking any form of science and so considered myth. However, it was through myth and other representations of life that ancient cultures made sense of their origins, their past, their social and religious structures and their collective existence. The indigenous people of Australia believed their existence had been inherited from the ancestors in the Dreamtime. This belief and myth systems was their history and their

philosophical system used to make sense of the world. The Native American Indians were linked to animals and nature in their ordering of the world and in their beliefs of their origins. And these are just two broad examples among so many others in the world of how history existed outside history.

Taking the discussion further, from an anthropological perspective, it is not necessarily the passing of time that is relevant in historical terms, but how a specific event is of symbolic value to the culture within which it is taking place, and the observation, documenting and interpretation of this fact and occurrence. The cultural value attributed to a given circumstance, person or event is what Sahlins termed as "historical metaphors of a mythical reality." (Sahlins 1995:11)

Different things – objects, facts, events – are of value in the construction of identity in so far as they become factors of awareness and motivation for the piecing together and subsequent building of individual or group identity. Awareness determines the form and role any abstract or material object takes up and how it is assimilated into cultural practices and used to serve a specific function. There are various factors at play in this procedure of incorporating (new) forms into daily practices including social, ideological and economic ones; and endless interpretations and ways of re-structuring, reordering and emphasizing actions and events through these same forms.

In semiotic terms, a fact, event or person to which meaning is attached is the object of historical and scientific analysis and can be considered a sign. A sign is arranged according to and has a specific meaning within a specific context. In the same sense, a sign may be of interest, or raise awareness, to anyone for any specific reason and be viewed in relation to this interest. The same is true of groups, communities and nations. Meaning and how signs are interpreted may vary from person to person and as a result of their actual or metaphorical representation in life. Objectivity in a world of subjectively perceived meanings and signs is close to impossible. And to further complicate the argument, human beings are capable of individual thought and action, but these cognitive and performative processes and practices are sanctioned and controlled, even as non-written codes, by society.[22] So an individual is

[22] Individual will is structured according to society and its laws. If a staircase in a public space has a sign which stays "Do not use stairs" even though the stairs seem perfectly safe, and they are the best way to reach a destination, most people will follow the rule despite individual will to use the stairs.

also bound to his/her role as a social being and to the standards, codes and rules imposed by society and fellow humans with whom they interact.

History, therefore, can be understood as the result of individual thought and interest in a particular event, figure or nation, but the interpretation and representation of history is never free from social, cultural, political or philosophical influences. History and historical interpretation begins when human are able to recognize the world around them, understand signs as meaningful within a broader intellectual and philosophical discourse and relevant in the cultural world when bound and connected to other signs. The interconnectivity and interaction of signs and the meaning they produce altogether form a socio-cultural context through which individuals within a community make sense of the world around them. The passing of time is also a fundamental process in the understanding of signs and in the development of philosophical and scientific thought. Meanings are not fixed, but ever changing. And time, though it does move forward, as human science and experience has determined, the past can be interpreted and re-interpreted, revisited, re-defined, re-created and re-ordered infinite times, like myths. So perhaps the so called 'natives' were not as primitive in their beliefs as the European claimed for they lived in a world of ongoing interpretation of their own past and present existence. The point of interpretation which the Western world has by now reached in postmodern thinking.

Signs, which had attributed meaning and structure for both the British and Indians and were referential in each culture's experience of life with its social interactions, developed new relationships when they came into contact with different signifiers. New meanings arose from the rearrangement of signs as they became of interest to new subjects. The roles of master and servant, of husband and wife, the value of authority, the practice of professions, the establishment of laws, the expression of emotion or desire, just to name a few examples, were all practices that were brought to light in a new context. Social relations, social roles, laws and administration of land and property, language and the place of the sacred and profane were all structures that were shaken and reworked in an inevitable desire and attempt to reorder.

The shift in theoretical perspectives that came about helps to understand how limiting the history of India had been in interpreting and constructing an authentic idea of the nation

and culture in the two centuries prior to independence. Through a Marxist reading of events a pattern of awakening can be applied to the Indian social, cultural and political panorama in the 19th and 20th centuries during the British presence. The formation and rising of a class or in this case a national consciousness would lead to a reversal of power relations. The overturn of the relation of power where the colonizer and imperial European ruled and dominated, controlled and subjugated the native man and world was seen as possible through this awakening. The nation could ideally function within the socialist logic of working towards a common progress consequently leading to a utopian ideal of the economic state in ideological political terms, or Enlightenment in human consciousness and the attainment of Reason in philosophical terms. In other words, the Indian people uniting in collective socio-cultural and political consciousness would be able to create a common identity necessary for the re-appropriation of their history.

The Saidian perspective reintroduced the idea of a system of thought as a structure in the understanding and ordering of the world. Orientalism brought back the notion of a separation between "self" and "other" placing importance on the structure as fundamental in the definition and understanding of another system of culture. Said's theoretical and academic critique of the colonial logic reduced Western thought to this basic binary model of East and West. And, as Robert Young has argued, Said became one of the pioneers of postcolonial theory because through Orientalism a social and cultural perspective of how the Orient had been constructed and affected by the Occident was provided. At the time and prior to Said's theory there had been no alternative to this model of critical analysis, besides the Marxist approach, which focused more on the economic development of society.

> What enabled Orientalism to be so outstandingly successful, and establish a whole new field of academic enquiry? The key factor was undoubtedly the way in which the idea of Orientalism as a discourse allowed the creation of a general theoretical paradigm through which the cultural forms of colonial and imperial ideologies could be analysed.
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> While Marxist accounts had emphasized the primacy of the economic in the development of colonialism and imperialism, the diversity of economic conditions, the historical and geographical differences between colonies (how to compare, for example, the United States with India?) meant that there was no general schema through which the particularity of the cultural effects of colonialism and imperialism could be analysed. (Young 1995:2)

It was postcolonialism as a theory which opened up the possibility for new perspectives also coming from the West, but mainly from other locations beyond the Western sphere of knowledge, understanding and control. The construction of knowledge of the Orient, as Said defined it, was a theoretical and academic invention of the Occident used for the reinforcement of power relations, as an imposition of a discourse of violence and as a silencing of the other. The Orient al as a colonized subject was denied a position, a voice and a space for expression within this discourse.

To the Europeans and in line with the imperialistic ideal of Said's Orientalism it was assumed that Indians lived outside of history though, as previously mentioned, the passing of time had a different significance and relevance within their cultural, religious and existential logic. Myth, religious systems and ritualized daily practices governed the lives of Indian people and these social structures and forms were seen as superstitious rather than scientific by Europeans, and so Indians were incapable of understanding themselves or their history. In this sense, they, the Indians, were unable to evolve as their European, or British counterparts had done.

> A mind existing in a timeless moment, unaware of past or future, might well experience eternity but it could make no sense of the world around it, or, indeed, of itself. Every meaningful instant of consciousness really extends temporally both backwards and forwards. Every present event perceived as intelligible is understood as flowing from a remembered past and pointing to an unknown future. Memory is not simply a storehouse of data but an indispensable activity in our perception of present meanings. As memory is to the individual so history is to the life of mankind. (Mazzeo 1991:387-8)

History not only stored and registered facts, but also provided a perspective, and therefore an interpretation of these same facts, whether people, events, or political circumstances. It was through this academic procedure that meaning could be extracted and produced from an event which if left unaccounted for would be lost in time. India, from a British perspective was not capable of recording and interpreting its past historically and so use past events for an understanding of its present. The practical outcome of this premise was one of colonial dominance, since on a scale of development and civilization, Indian people were far behind the British and subject to imperial or colonial domination.

The result of this colonial encounter, however, as I have been trying to prove throughout my discussion, was more than an overthrowing and reversal of power. It was a reordering, or rearrangement of the systems at work to formulate a new reality, open up a new space for expression. This new space, which can be understood as the postcolonial, allowed the Orient to reposition itself in a world till then dominated by an Occidental ideal of universal truth. The shape through which the Orient al perspective was pronounced was borrowed from the colonial masters, but it later came to be incorporated within the native culture to emerge as a new expression of culture.

This new expression of culture, this new space opened up by the British presence fused old and new forms. In its essence it was composed of a traditional core, but externally it used new forms of expression. The novel, for example is a European form which did not exist in Indian culture prior to the arrival of the British. It was the Indian writer, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) who first introduced the novel to Indian literature. Likewise his contemporary, Michael Madhusidan Dutt (1824-73) wrote poetry which mixed English and Bengali forms. So as far back as the early 19th century, Indian writers were already appropriating English forms – not only in the use of language, as I have referred earlier in the chapter, but as structural delineation to cultural modes of expression.

This adoption of English forms brought about a re-evaluation of an ancient fixed system of thought and expression. It changed the language of discourse. The language and discourse of the colonial and imperial powers became the language of the colonized and therefore the language and discourse of resistance and change. This change, however, also signified a new sense of national and cultural unity, through a new vision of the nation. “Re-evaluating history fostered self-confidence and a novel sense of national identity. But it also posed a dilemma for educated Indians. How long could tradition and progress exist before there was a collision?” (Lawrence: 1997:353)

It is currently possible to read and learn about any aspect of Indian society and history from any perspective. The social and cultural history and anthropology of Indian society is also accepted as a literary and visual practice of the hybrid and displaced Indian in the Diaspora who is capable of recreating a pop version of India for commercial purposes and for a Western audience. An inside look on India is in demand and from India new writers and

narratives keep emerging. Translation too has provided a new vision of India through the vernacular languages. It could be argued, as Lau and Mendes have, that Indian writers who write in English are "repackaging the Orient for global consumption" (Lau and Mendes 2011: 2). They have termed them as Re-Orientalists, serving as a sort of "tour guide" for Westerners wanting to read about eastern cultures, which are still today considered foreign, different, and flavour the exotic imaginary. But I will go pick up this debate again later.

This ancient nation, once called Bharata in the sacred Sanskrit language, goes back thousands of years and is rich in historical depth, cultural and material heritage. All that is required for a study of its culture and socio-history is there to be found and speaks for itself. India's sociological past could have been uncovered, empirically analysed and written about, through a thorough study of its social structures and customs, and there were scholars who gained increasing interest in the ancient customs, religions, language and literature of India. An interesting and, for academic purposes, useful fact about Indian society is the unchangeable nature of its social and religious beliefs. The caste system, as I have previously mentioned still governing Indian society today can be traced back centuries and it is a recurrent theme in visual arts, literature and film. The antiquity of its traditions and social structure and its continuity, even when communities form in the diaspora, are fundamental in the tracing of a historical past.

The beliefs and spiritual ideals of the Indian people were revealed through sacred texts, art work and literature, the existence and lifestyle of kings and emperors could be made known through images on coins, toys, art work and architectural structures and artefacts found in the palaces and temples, while the customs and daily habits of the population, mostly rural, could be constructed through an interpretation of the land and its rural activities, the caste system, religious beliefs and artefacts. All this historical and anthropological data was there, ready to be seized and up for interpretation.

Although Indian records of its historical past reveal ancient customs and tell a lot about the people and its culture throughout the centuries, they had failed to conform to Western standards of historical accounts. Material culture, heritage and tradition are essential elements in the construction of a social history, but are not an academic register or a political

interpretation of a nation's own past in writing and can only be written about by archaeologist, historians and anthropologists.

The absence of a factual narrative can, nevertheless, be counter-played by the existence of ancient sacred texts, literatures from different historical periods which reveal much about gods, royalty, society and myths such as the Puranas and Sangam literature. These are authentic and indigenous cultural vestiges of a society in its uncorrupted form. Sacred texts focus on what was essential to Indian spirituality while the language of poetry and literature portrayed their world through verse and myth. Material culture and archaeological remains helped patch any gaps and inconsistencies left by literary and religious texts. And to further complement the construction of Indian history there are also autobiographies of Mughal emperors and foreign accounts of Western visitors in travel writing as well as the novels, letters and factual texts written by the British during their presence in India in the 18th and 19th centuries which also describe Indian social life as perceived by others.

Through a piecing together of these literary and material relics, a portrait of a culture could be drafted. This was the work of anthropologists. But anthropologists were mostly Western academics and as purely empirical as their studies may have been and their writings produced, they were also bound by subjectivity.

> In short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot. (By definition, only a "native" makes first order ones: it's *his* culture). They are thus fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are "something made", "something fashioned" – the original meaning of fiction – not that they are false, infactual; or merely "as if" thought experiments. (Geertz 1973:15)

Narratives are interpretations of life, imaginative constructions of the world whose role is determined by those who have the power to use them as necessary. The concern of the narrative is not necessarily to produce an accurate account of real events, but to open up the doors of imaginative possibility to reproduce creative experiences of life events. These events may not have affected a nation as a whole, but are just as valuable if they helped to shape individual and collective experience and identity. Narratives are manifestations of experience and in this sense fundamental documents in the reconstruction and understanding of history and culture.

Regardless of the existence of historical detail in India, political thinkers and historians during the Enlightenment still claimed that in this nation there remained an absence of history. There seems to be, therefore, not a lack of records to construct a consistent history of India, but "a scarcity of material giving the Indian side of the story." (Singhal 1983:10)

It was therefore a fairly easy task for British and other European historians and philosophers to appropriate themselves of Indian history and to construct historical interpretations and ideological narratives as political tools wherever necessary. It was easy to claim that this was a land of superstitious people without historical depth who lacked a logical understanding of time and events. Until the time of Independence, the interpretation of Indian history had been in the hands of Western thought, politics and academics. When India became independent, however, "her overriding objective was to reconcile her heritage with modern needs and to acquire a new personality without giving up her old image." (Singhal 1983:399)

In Marxist analysis a political role in society is acquired through consciousness, class-consciousness, or even self-consciousness. The formation of a national identity, or the establishment of place on the global map, is the natural path for former colonized nations which have gained socio-political consciousness and achieved a state of independence from their colonizers. But the political or even cultural discourse which post-colonial nations come to assimilate, claim as theirs and adapt to their daily practices differs in form from its original organic composition, to the codes which composed its original genetic core. It is a borrowed or culturally imposed form required for a position of authority over the nation's own destiny and in order to be recognized in a world where Western standards rule.

> In postcolonialism the political claims that are most urgent in decolonized space are tacitly recognized as coded within the legacy of imperialism: nationhood, constitutionality, citizenship, democracy, socialism, even culturalism. In the historical frame of exploration, colonization, decolonization, what is being *effectively* reclaimed is a series of regulative political concepts, whose supposedly authoritative narrative of production was written elsewhere in the social formations of Western Europe. They are thus being reclaimed, indeed claimed, as concept-metaphors for which no *historically* adequate referent may be advanced from post-colonial space. (Spivak 1996:164)

Political power has always been the main factor influencing historical thinking and writing and nations of people who were considered inferior were always denied a personal portrayal of their own past for political reasons, and also because they did not expose their story in the same form as Europeans who dominated political history and thought. For this reason, India as other non-Western nations were considered politically worthless, a historical void. Postcolonialism as a cultural state adopts Western political, social, economic and cultural concepts in a reconstruction of the decolonized nation's identity. Postcolonial theory supports and conceptualizes this movement towards a progressive independent nation state where culture is understood as crossing a bridge that connects its former, 'primitive' pre-colonial state to a new hybrid construction of past and present.

A history of India was non-existent in Western standards, but as previously mentioned a learning of other tangible and non-tangible heritage can provide a thorough understanding of the nation. Western history is structured as a chronological narrative of a nation's conquests and defeats, non-Western historical narratives, in this specific case, what India had written about itself in the form of sacred texts, verse, or other forms of art, reveal the socio-cultural roots from which this land and its people developed. And to make sense of the people and their culture, it is absolutely necessary to see their world through their own eyes and manifestations through time. "To understand Indian history, it is therefore important to realize how India looks upon herself." (Singhal 1983:xi). A social understanding and as such a historical picture of a nation and its culture can only be fully comprehended from an inside perspective. It is from internal cultural processes that structures and traditions emerge. Classifying and interpreting cultural systems according to academic global or Western standards can result in the "othering" of a society and the reinforcement of ideological assumptions and cultural stereotyping. "Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be casually attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described." (Geertz 1973:14). But as central to this thesis is the belief and argument in its support that a full understanding of a nation's history, its people and culture can only be attained through a piecing together of bits of information from different levels, perspectives and times and in an ongoing dialogue with each other. All perspectives are important and together compose the

narrative that defines national culture and history. In this chapter I am discussing nation and culture as an organic whole, not really taking into account individual experience something which is further developed in the next two chapters.

The English language as a new narrative space

Another important fact in the assertion of power was language. With the coming of Independence in 1947, once again the writing of history and an interpretation of the nation's past was placed in the hands of a selected few to represent the rest of its population. Indian scholars, politicians, activists, poets, film makers and novelists who were able to represent and speak out for the Indian nation and culture to the rest of the world, did so, mostly in English, even if with the aid of translation.

What might be regarded as a historical or cultural narrative is shaped by the nature of events, the cultural mood and individual interpretation, as we have already seen. In the same way the narratives that originate from a particular nation are also responsible for the shaping cultural identity as it is passed down through the generations and perceived by the rest of the world. It is through a direct involvement with cultural forms that the message produced from a narrative both gives form and reinforces meanings to codes and signs within a society. The presence and withdrawal of the British in India undoubtedly brought about fundamental changes in the Indian cultural system. Again, one of these changes being the use of the English language and the other, having the novel as a literary form. Both were appropriated by Indian writers and academics as a linguistic and literary form, which is today as characteristic of the Indian nation and cultural identity as Sanskrit, Hindi or Urdu in speech and writing, and perhaps more diffused in its use. But this linguistic medium makes it clear to readers worldwide and to the Indian people themselves, that India was once a colonized nation. Indian literature in English is therefore a historical process in continuous dialogue between past and present carving out a space for itself in a post-colonial world.

Indian literature that existed prior to the British Empire was a naïve (in Western standards) depiction of people and their relationship with the land, and the universe. The

myths that gave life to their deities were sacred and defined social life and hierarchies in India. The sacred texts gave people an understanding of themselves and their relationships with each other. As Jeannette Armstrong wrote on the Syilx (Okanogan) [23] people of North American lands, "I position Indigenous oral literature as the 'voice of the land', as a record of the way land itself established how humans, over generations, might speak its required realities" (Armstrong 2012: 354). Stories whether written or orally transmitted are held together and passed down through the working of a collective memory which functions as the core structure of a group's cultural identity. It is only inevitable, in a world undergoing many transformations, the meaning of these stories which provide fundamental links to the imaginary or metaphysical notion of the past as a present structure that defines culture may also need to adapt to these changes. To quote Armstrong again,

> These are observations I tender as a contribution to the question: What should a literature for our times be? Should it not strive to be a part of finding new ways in which the old earth 'story' might be remembered by the people of these times, through literature as 'story'? Should it not be a time to reconstruct what the narrow confines of 'literature' might be in order to begin the task of transforming the stories we tell to the people-to-be? (Armstrong 2012: 355)

Just as the Syilx must adapt to their changing world by reinventing their literary forms, so too the Indian people of post-colonial India reinvented their identity and opened up a new space for evaluation of their nation, language and culture through the symbiosis of traditional, pre-colonial forms and reproduced colonial forms. It is a fallacy to consider this assimilation of British linguistic, literary, academic and political values as a uniform phenomenon that affected the Indian people independent of caste, gender, social or economic status, culture and linguistic differences as a whole and in an equal fashion. India is a nation of great social and economic divisions and the changes that occurred in the process of the establishment of the British Raj to the end of the empire and decolonization through to an independent state affected the many strands of society differently. The social group, which may even be

[23] Syilx, also known as the Okanogan are a Native Americans people of the northern region of North America. Their language is Syilx and they have a strong oral tradition.

understood as the individuals which I am dealing with in this thesis is, according to my argument, just as representative of the Indian people and culture as any other voice that emerges and speaks out in their own terms.

> Our times are such that we need to listen to the voice of the land, to hear the stories of the land retold and, in the retelling, kindle a new fire from the small embers still glowing. These are times to light up the writing on the cave-wall. It is a time for a new fire, inside this dark age of such vast ecological illiteracy and frightening zealotry in the perfection of the science of 'consumption'. It is a time of ignorance and madness, and we stand at the edge of an abyss, the depth of which we cannot imagine.
>
> To transform the people-to-be, we must begin to raise up the pillars of how we need to relate to each other and how we need to relate to the land, in the minds of all who will hear our stories. Transformation is necessary in order for 'regeneration' of the land and ourselves to occur. (Armstrong 2012: 355)

This term 'regeneration' which Armstrong uses shares a parallel meaning with the terms 'reordering', 're-evaluation' and 'reinterpretation' which I have been using up until this point in my analysis. It is interesting to note, nonetheless, that Armstrong is conducting her research on a group of people who share a common cultural and mythological past and identity. The people of India, however, are a diverse national group characterized by many different linguistic, religious and cultural traits. Each representative group within the Indian nation was differently affected by the colonial encounter just like each group reacted to it in specific ways. Individual reactions to the colonial experience and the re-designing of nation, resulted in the definition of culture branching out in many different forms, of which Indian writing in English is just one among the others.

Being a selected few in a multi-cultural nation, what power do these writers possess to be able to represent their homeland? Were they defining an identity for India through their writing or were they, speaking for a nation in control of its own voice and destiny, carving out a new space for themselves within the grander Indian cultural melting pot? In Gayatri Spivak's words, "I have trouble with questions of identity or voice. I'm much more interested in questions of space, because identity and voice are such powerful concept-metaphors, that after a while you begin to believe that you are what you're fighting for." (Spivak 1996: 21) India is a nation composed of so many different cultural, religious, social, linguistic as well

as racial differences that it would be an extremely difficult and inaccurate task to group everyone together as one. It is essential to acknowledge the role of a space for the representation of an idea of India and Indian identity. It is not so much the quality of position of the voice that matters, but the fact that the possibility for this voice to be heard now exists. Any voice, be it Roy's, Desai's, Rushdie's, the woman who hung herself while menstruating, the bride who resists marriage, the untouchable who questions his role and position in society, or Tagore who instituted the teaching of Indian vernacular languages at schools and universities and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 (being perhaps the most important poet in representation of the Bengali, but more generally, Indian nation's heritage and culture). Each cultural, political or social manifestation of the Indian people is a valuable and essential piece in the construction of a cultural history and a deeper understanding of the people and nation.

The highest value of fiction perhaps lies in the ability to create a story as an aesthetic and creative interpretation of history or a counter history, rather than in portraying any factual account of history. Following Independence, India and its people became a "subject *for* that story, not so much a subject *of* that history." (Spivak 1996: 25) Writers, as perpetuators of culture, gained command of their nation's narratives producing and spreading new visions of India.

> I think, strategically, we should use that [imaginative responsibility], so that, in fact, the work of constructing new narrativizations of what is taken to be truth – in other words, history – can be helped by what is taken to be the field of nothing but narrative. Fiction making can become an ally of history when it is understood that history is a very strong fictioning where, to quote Derrida, the possibility of fiction is not derived from anterior truths. Counterfactual histories that exercise imaginative responsibility – is that the limit? (Spivak 1996: 28)

This was achieved through a newly gained consciousness. When the subject becomes aware of itself and its ability to freely express its ideas to the rest of the world, a desire arises to impose a new found truth or a newly uncovered truth which in fact has always existed but now makes sense in a new light, and through a new mode of production. In a new national context, and in the process of constructing a collective and individual identity, specific groups

or individuals who have in their power the means through which to command a nation both politically and culturally had to be prepared to leave behind certain principles and accept others. Language, religion, traditions all underwent changes in this process.

The adoption and appropriation of the English language and the novel as an Indian literary form was a symptom of the post-colonial. But this literary form became, perhaps today for the rest of the English speaking world, even more representative than other Indian literary and linguistic forms of expression. In Rushdie's provocative words,

> English literature has its Indian branch. By this I mean the literature of the English language. This literature is also Indian literature. There is no incompatibility here. If History creates complexities, let us not try to simplify them.
>
> So: English is an Indian literary language, and by now, thanks to writers like Tagore, Desani, Chaudhuri, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Anita Desai and others, it has quite a pedigree. (Rushdie 1991:65)

The grouping of literary and artistic expressions into one category, be it "Indian", "Commonwealth" "English" runs synonymous with the ideal of imposing a Universal logic to a world of different and varied cultures and people. Recognizing that Indian writing in English is a literary form that represents the Indian nation or a strand of the Indian nation, its past and present, is recognizing that the world, despite its natural life cycles is also shaped and defined by individual thought, action, expression and interpretation. The world is also, for better or for worse, defined by economic forces and the commercialization and internationalization of both language and literature has by now become an irrevocable fact.

From the postcolonial to the postmodern

The postmodern condition which is commonly represented as the loss of fixed references serves as a philosophical explanation for the state at which we find ourselves and the world today. In the postmodern condition of writing or producing art, there is a shift towards the reinterpretation of the world and therefore history. Along with a reinterpretation,

there is also a desire to personalize experience so as to make it meaningful to individuals. By doing so, theoretical perspectives shift from believing it is the nation as an entity or universal truths that determine the actions of mankind to the idea that man is responsible for his own actions that will in turn affect a historical writing of the world.

The 18th and 19th century ideal of historical truth and the dependence on facts for a believed reliable representation of the past through writing was counteracted for its validity by a need to freely develop ideas on past and present events. Literature, through fiction, drama or poetry provided creative interpretations of the world by focusing and adapting universal truths and historical legacies to everyday life and people. In other words, history began to be viewed from the bottom up as a network of individual perspectives of small slices of a bigger world, rather than an overlying fixed structure that imposed a perspective on and governed thought and action. These individual perspectives besides being subjective interpretations of life are also valuable creative and imaginative documents of the personal accounts of a shared experience.

This is not to say that the relation between history and power has been surpassed and rendered obsolete. Historical knowledge and writing are still associated with power, but what has changed is the view that power is now dispersed and has lost its core as power. Foucault proposed that the world is governed by "epistemes", trends of thought which remain for some time, decades or centuries and are then replaced by new epistemes. Power, language, writing and the historian are all linked and governed by the episteme.

> By demonstrating how the perception of the world (be it present or past) is inherently dependent on power relations, Foucault shattered the belief that 'reality' has an objective existence outside of the episteme which presently surrounds the historian. In other words, what is accepted as 'true' or 'false', as 'scientific' or 'fictional', as 'wrong' or 'right' is not a matter of stable ontologies, but a function of the current discursive system which in turn relies on power-related mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion. (Rostek 2011: 41)

In postmodern times, the claim is that it is impossible to know the past and how it really happened and it is also impossible to objectively reproduce it. Knowledge of the past, historical truth, is only possible through its perspective interpretation in the present. The theoretical shift has also come to include a discourse on the relationship between power,

structure and language and no longer on the scientific value of history. Language, being the medium through which history is represented and documented, the power to manipulate the past and how it is perceived, the ability to purvey meaning through words is accomplished through this very same language. How language is applied through different rhetorical and stylistic strategies to convey meaning and recreate an event as realistic or as a creative interpretation, brings the roles and aims of history and literature closer together. Furthermore, the dramatic emphasis narratives, being history or fiction, are given is produced by the choice of language the writer/historian employs.

For all the above mentioned reasons, it is feasible, for the sake of my argument, to advance with the claim that the historian, as the writer of fiction is also a literary artist. The historian chooses to recreate an event in writing which has sprouted an interest in him/herself. The historian then chooses the linguistic strategies, descriptive analyses and rhetoric styles that will be employed for the purpose of his narrative stance. These choices are made according to what effect or reaction the writer/historian expects the reader to have on reading the written words. To a reader who has no knowledge of the reported events, persons or era, the narrative will serve as a "history lesson" and as a link between past and present, local and foreign. To the reader who is to some extent familiar with the reported occurrences in the narrative, it may alter perspectives and increase knowledge of the past and therefore the present understanding of the world. This is achieved by both the writer of fiction as by the writer of history, and later in the third chapter, by the ethnographer as well. The narrative value and truth may be questioned, but doubt, reliability and authenticity are accepted states and approaches to cognitive processes in the postmodern world.

So following Hayden White's (1985) arguments on the proximity between historiography and literature, I would also argue that historical writing and interpretation, as affected by the postmodern condition, has become a matter of individual and personal experience. To add to the personal and individual nature of writing today, the form of expression follows no guidelines of dictated form. It has therefore moved closer to how human beings really experience life. In this sense, narratives as such may finally be considered authentic.

All lives and events have a beginning and an end, at final stance the definite end is death. But even as life and events end, they can be revisited as long as memory and reconstruction through narratives allow for revisiting. So in fact, the beginning and the ending become irrelevant as I will go on to explain. The space in between a beginning and an ending is composed of different moments, actions and interactions of varying degrees of importance for each one who experiences them. We shall call these happenings in a person's life, phenomena for the purpose of this part of the discussion. These phenomena may be of such big scales that affect a whole nation or nations, such as a war, or natural disaster (etc) or which may be small in terms of national or international proportions, but greatly affect individuals, such as birth, death, love, achievements, pain, gain and loss (etc). Although the movement of time is acknowledged as linear, and equal in duration at all given moments, human beings perceive the passing of time according to phenomena that affect them as individuals. We anticipate the future with feelings of hope, anxiety, excitement or fear and time appears to move faster or slower according to these feelings just as present events pass almost unnoticed or are given a heightened sense of importance, making once again time seem more or less intense, and lasting longer at any given moment. Following this same logic, once events move into the realm of the past, they are stored, or not, in our memories, conscience or subconscious.

How we use the past and phenomena that shape the past to effectively construct present states of reality and meaning at all levels may, in fact, also be considered fiction making, writing history as a story, a narrative. This is so because the art of creating narratives and in particular writing on historical subjects involves the process of creatively interpreting events according to individual perspective. If each individual gives life to specific phenomena by recreating it in a narrative form, multiple meanings may be constructed out of each experience of the phenomenon.

> Accordingly, the latter [contemporary fiction] deals with the function of discursive constructions in creating meaning, with the difference between the actual past and the history that is written about it, with the problem of textual remains from the past which become history only through an act of necessarily biased interpretation, with the impossibility of objectivity and the thence resultant need of pluralist and multi-perspectivist history writing. (Rostek 2011:41)

How is it possible then to judge what interpretation of a given phenomenon is the authentic one and which of the interpretations is free of subjective analysis and free of individual stylistic emphasis in its presentation? This is the difficulty we are faced with when attempting to separate historical writing from literature. History can be understood as the experience of life events and literature is an aesthetic representation of life according to the author's perception of events. Historiography, therefore, is also the representation of past events in writing according to the historian's perception, interpretation and narrative style. It seems as though the two are very close. So looking back now from this perspective, are not the sacred texts, or other narratives of India also national narratives and histories as interpretations of the Indian experience? And what are we, as researchers, also doing when reflecting on the past through present theory in our interpretation of the world, but reworking ideas?

In postmodern literature, most narratives follow a non-sequential logic whereby the reader becomes aware of events regardless of chronological order. According to the German philosopher Brentano, time was considered a continuum made up of different abstract points along a line. These points were boundaries that distinguished one from the other. Between two visible or recognizable points there exist an infinite number of other points. Applied to experience this infinite number of points and the magnitude and intensity of each one, differed. In *The God of Small Things* Estha and Rahel while watching the Kathakali dance theatre, "[They] emerge from one story only to delve deep into another." (Roy 1997: 234) And just like Kathakali whose stories emerge of the Katahkali man's "magic", in story-telling, as in historical interpretation, no two sets of events or experiences will be told in the same way. And in a complete story, every piece of information and detail, from every perspective and interpretation is valuable in its composition.

It didn't matter that the story had begun, because kathakali discovered long ago that the secret of the Great Stories is that they *have* no secrets. The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. The ones you can enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably. They don't deceive you with thrills and trick endings. They don't surprise you with the unforeseen. They are as familiar as the house you live in. Or the smell of your lover's skin. You know how they end, yet you listen as though you don't. In the way that although you know

that one day you will die, you live as though you won't. In the great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn't. And yet you want to know again.

That is the mystery and their magic. (Roy 1997: 229)

The telling and re-telling of experience through fictional narratives does not have to follow a linear time sequence. If we can consider the continuum to be composed of many different points of varying degrees, then, "the idea of the continua of various degrees of completeness seems also to be incompatible with the true solution to the problem of constructing the continuum" (Brentano 1988:3). All experience and all points that lead to the whole are capable of being broken into an infinite number of connected parts. Considering the infinite possibilities in the outlining of a sequence, as Brentano writes, "we should apparently have something that began but without having any beginning," (Brentano 1988:4) and therefore no sequence. Some points or events are remembered as meaningful and remain, "Preserved. Accounted for. Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story" (Roy 1997: 33), while others, are forgotten, dismissed or unknown.

In *The God of Small Things* all the events in the narrative take place simultaneously in the twin's experience of life and the passing of time. "In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was For Ever," (Roy 1997:2). Roy seems to be telling the reader there are many possible ways of beginning a story, and of ending it, and everything that happens in between is arbitrary. But the end of the story can also be the beginning, the very key to the unlocking of the past and all the different moments can be meaningful.

Another theoretical possibility of why events are presented in a non-linear fashion in many contemporary novels, besides the aesthetic argument, may be because of what causes individuals to relive past experiences. We recall, relive and interpret experiences through individual memory by relating the past with the present. In the attempt to make sense of the present we search through the stored data of our brains for some past information that may aid in the production of meaning. Because analysing past experiences may somewhat change meanings or result in new interpretation in the light of present circumstances, this process becomes a step in the production of new narratives. Every time we tell a story, certain parts

or details may be added or omitted. Narratives and the phenomena they recreate are filled with nuances and hidden meanings which may be uncovered through interpretation or left untouched. Every narrative tells a story, recreates an experience and gives structure and meaning to individual existence, and to the construction of a nation's cultural history.

In the famous extract from Salman Rushdie's essay "Imaginary Homelands" already included in the Introduction to this thesis, he describes the different factors that altogether give shape to individual identity. This idea is a metaphor for how the idea of the nation is also constructed, and the end product, which is always incomplete is in fact a fragile structure.

> But human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved: perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to death. (Rushdie 1991: 12)

There is no certainty in meaning in the present state of the world, as there is no way to obtain certainty from the past. Meaning, as Rushdie advances, is constructed from partial perceptions rather than from a structured whole. But this fragmented construction of meaning has and gives coherence to those who have constructed it and to those who can see sense in these representations. "Writers are no longer sages, dispensing the wisdom of the centuries. And those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism faced upon us." (Rushdie 1991: 12) I would further argue that by now postmodernism has sunk in.

In "Imaginary Homelands" Rushdie puts forward the idea that the reproduction of the past in writing is dependent on the "distortions of the memory" (Rushdie 1991: 10). Upon deciding to write *Midnight's Children* he comes to terms with the fact that,

> "what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: 'my' India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honourable and suspect, and I knew that my India may only have been one to which I (who am no longer what I was, and

who by quitting Bombay never became what perhaps I was meant to be) was, let us say, willing to admit I belonged. (Rushdie 1991: 10)

Rushdie recreates an India with which he can identify, his India, which even being so, could have been so many different ideals according to the turns his life could have taken. In his novel he reconstructs an image of his past which he can relate to and is able to consider his history. The pieces of his past which he collects from his memory to construct a meaningful idea of historical India are more valuable to his purpose than documents or paragraphs out of history books.

"It was precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me. The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities." (Rushdie 1991: 12)

On the same line of argument, through literature, and in the postmodern state of affairs, it is also possible to give a voice to those groups who seem to dwell in a realm outside of historical discourse. The "subaltern" in Spivak's words and whom they represent: the marginalized, the weaker subjects, the dominated, the women, the children, the black communities, the colonized, and the untouchables of the Hindu Caste system. All these groups find in literature an appropriate space through which they may claim a place in history and national, as well as global culture.

These marginalized groups challenge the traditional framework that defines the writer or historian and consequently that shapes the ideological layout of the narrative.

But the vital connection between power and (historical) knowledge, so poignantly described by Foucault, is also determinedly laid bare in contemporary novels. Particularly the Foucauldian notion of discourse – paraphrased by Hutcheon as "the system of norms or rules that govern a certain way of thinking and writing at a certain time and place" (*ibid*.:185) – translates into the novels' metafictional awareness of their own ideological implications: the authors know that they "talk and write within certain social, historical, and institutional (and thus political and economic frameworks" (*ibid*.:184) which they cannot step out of. (Rostek 2011: 42)

In the postmodern novel writers deliberately attempt to challenge fixed notions of history by redefining accepted forms. In this process, the writer by contesting or challenging a former historical perspective is also reaffirming it. History did happen in such a way, that is undeniable, but in the process other voices emerged which are able to patch the breaches with other experiences. In contemporary literature a new concern emerges with reinterpreting and rewriting history. [24] This reinterpretation is generally associated with the need to question the very writing of history and to challenge prior forms that were taken for granted as reliable and single sources of historical truth. What I am arguing is not that the theme of the contemporary novel is merely to tell individual stories from the Indian perspective of the British Raj, or the experience of a servant, or of a widow, though these are all possibilities. It is that any story is relevant, as any story can be used to reconstruct individual experience, and each individual regardless of social status or role is a fundamental piece in the construction of the nation.

Novels such as *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* are not historical novels in the sense that they are set in a past time and try to portray the past as realistically as possible. The narratives are set in the present day and are a call to question on how characters, the culture that shapes them and the land they inhabit have been affected by historical processes. Furthermore, these novels also seek, through their narrative styles that move away from traditional forms the urge to reveal the difficulties in realistically portraying straightforward historical truth.

> What contemporary self-reflexive, discontinuous, and often difficult historiographic metafiction does is work to subvert this very view of history that much poststructuralist thought is also contesting. And, not surprisingly, it has been received with much the same vehement response from those whom the novel too – like history – represents and presents a coherent and motivated inscription of a unified subjectivity. (Hutcheon 2004: 160)

[24] Rostek describes Ansgar Nünnings "typology of English historical fiction after 1950" (Rostek 2011:43) as containing "five types of historical novels: the documentary historical novel, the realist historical novel, the revisionist historical novel, the metahistorical novel, and historiographic metafiction." (Rostek 2011: 43)

The postmodern novel provides a way of dealing with the past whereby rather than history being written; "individual histories" or stories or narratives are being created. These are the result of individual experience and subjective interpretation leading to multiple perspectives of one or any event. Characters themselves are no longer fixed as signifiers with a given meaning. They are open narratives waiting to be read and open to interpretation. Each novel becomes a cognitive experience where meanings and answers are found for whatever academic aspect being researched into, from history to language. So besides the will to dispute old and formal historical perspectives found in postmodern literature, each novel is also a means to open up history writing to those who have previously been excluded from historical processes. "Thus, revisionist historical novels seek to challenge received and canonical versions of history by telling the past over and over again from the perspective of those who were previously excluded, victimized or objectified by the historical discourse." (Rostek 2011: 44)

Never having been written about except through the slanted perception of dominant groups, how are these people to genuinely reconstruct their past and consequently position themselves historically in the world? This reconstruction of the past is made possible through the piecing together of bits and pieces that form the collective memory.

Postmodern novels seem to be telling contemporary readers that there are many different ways for the historical past to be accounted for and there are many creative ways to represent the past and the phenomena that give it form in writing. And although there is a philosophical realm from which these novels are born, there is no model that defines the nature and form that they should conform to. Furthermore, there is the belief that by reinterpreting past events, the present will become meaningful.

> The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. "The truth will not run away from us": in the historical outlook of historicism these words of Gottfried Keller mark the exact point where historical materialism cuts through historicism. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.) (Benjamin 1977: 255)

The claim Walter Benjamin is making is that historical materialism rests fundamentally on the premise that events in the past are historical if they are rendered meaningful in the present understanding of our world. The past stored in memory is an imaginary construction of reality as it relies on how an event is remembered by individuals. But this is history making and history writing in postmodern times. A moment in time may be forever lost to mankind if it is not captured and retold or recreated for a present audience. This is the process by which the past becomes history and by which history becomes historiography, historical writing or historical fiction.

> "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger." (Benjamin 1977: 255)

This moment of danger Benjamin mentions is both the moment when the past is in danger of being irretrievably lost or when a specific moment in history runs the risk "of becoming a tool of the ruling classes." (Benjamin 1977: 255).

Memory plays an important role in the construction of history and in the understanding of history as narrative. In the 18th and 19th centuries memory was perceived, according to neuroscience, as an "entity" that stored facts such as a photo album or computer file. These facts were believed to be unchangeable and fixed in meaning and form. The past with its meaning belonged to the past and every detail of our past existence was stored somewhere in our memories. Contemporary scientific research on the memory and consciousness has called these ideas into question.

> If for centuries we have regarded memory as an entity, the neurosciences are now suggesting that it is an elaborate pattern of processes rather than an entity, and that it is not a matter of storage and retrieval of "representations" (or fixed images) of the past but a matter of procedures "created… developed over time" (Rosenfield 1988: 128, 127). The new theory is that memories are not "fixed memory traces" but "interpretations of previous impressions in terms of present circumstances" (Rosenfield 1988: 75) In other

words, memory is always present tense, the reverberations of the past brought to bear on, to contextualize, inform, and enrich experience in the here and now. (Gifford 2011: 22)

In his essay "'Errata': Or Unreliable Narration in *Midnight's Children*" Rushdie justifies the 'mistakes' in his 1981 novel through an objective assertion of these unreliable facts provided by his narrator Saleem. He distinguishes between literal truth and remembered truth, claiming that "He [Saleem] is also remembering, of course, and one of the simplest truths about any set of memories is that many of them will be false." (Rushdie 1981*:* 24)

To repeat: the neuro-sciences are exploring the proposition that memory in all its varieties is mapping and remapping in the present tense of consciousness; impressions from the past are being reworked, modified, recombined in the service of present moods, interests, needs, purposes. The new emphasis is not on opportunism and dishonesty (those are always with us no matter what our model of memory), but rather on the nature of memory as process – its so-called "survival function" in the here and now of experience. (Gifford 2011: 23)

Ideas from the past, historical facts that have been taken for granted or different cultural aspects to which a society or nation is associated with can be reworked at any moment in the present. The Caste system, for example has been represented in much colonial, postcolonial and now postmodern literature. Through fiction, untouchables are given a space for representation and today there is even a market for *untouchable* literature. Indian writing in English carries a social and cultural stigma, as any postcolonial literature does. The caste divisions are not ignored in fiction, just as they are still an active and functional aspect of contemporary Indian society, both in the homeland, as in the diaspora. So although ideally "casteless" in its essence, fiction maintains the continuation of the caste system unbroken while in some way also appealing for a casteless and classless society.

This ongoing relationship with the hierarchical system of caste in Indian society is a stretching of its historical past into the present, but simultaneously a reinterpretation of an ancient system and social division in light of present circumstances. As much as writers may be critical of this system, the portrayal and description of its working and the depiction of the characteristics of the different castes and Untouchables is in fact a way of strengthening its

existence. But it is also a way of affirming that all social strands are entitled to a position in the historical India, as they are capable of being represented in present day narratives of India.

By maintaining this classification of society in the form of the caste system, Indian writing in English seems to be playing along with its role as a mediator for Indian culture and society to the rest of the world providing a reworking of ideas and preconceptions through new narrative voices. These narratives, whether as those of Desai, Adiga and Roy which depict servant class characters and their experience, or those written by untouchables, both used in the deconstruction of social taboos and in the raising of awareness of social injustice. The present circumstances are used in the construction of narratives which may alter or further historical knowledge of a particular group of people. This may be also understood as a political manoeuvre on the part of the Western institutions, as marketing strategy for this kind of narrative. Either way it is, as Gifford has argued, a re-working of the past in the service of the present, through memory. In *The God of Small Things* the reader is told or informed of the fact that:

> Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint. In Mammachi's time, Paravans, like other untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those they addressed. (Roy 1997:74)

Although Roy is critical of the Indian caste system and the cruelty of social exclusion and equality that accompanies it, by including Untouchables in her characters alongside Touchable characters, she is creating a narrative on social divisions. In a sense she is placing herself in the position of a portrayer of Indian culture and history. She is Re-Orientalizing (Lau and Mendes, 2011) India in a brand new package. What is different about the way in which society is portrayed in novels by Indian writers who write in English is that a voice, identity, personality and existence is given to all social strands.

So in contemporary Indian literature, the subaltern do speak through a narrative voice. In *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The God of Small Things* not only are the subaltern given a voice, but also given life within fiction by being re-created according to their individual and collective identity. These identities have historical depth and through fiction it is possible to produce a narrative for the subaltern as historical subjects rather than being marginalized from historical processes for being subjects of history:

> If I ask myself: how is it possible to want to die by fire to mourn a husband ritually, I am asking the question of the (gendered) subaltern woman as subject, not, as my friend Jonathan Culler somewhat tendentiously suggests, trying to 'produce difference by differing' or to 'appeal… to a sexual identity defined as essential and privileg(ing) experiences associated with that identity. (Spivak 2010: 32)

British presence in India, as a colonial power enacting a position of authority over a colonized subject, resulted in what Homi Bhabha would term a "hybridization" of traditional European forms. For one, as I have already mentioned, the novel as a literary form was appropriated by Indian writers. This appropriation, or absorption of a cultural form into foreign space, opened up new possibilities to a people who had previously had no access or consciousness of these possibilities. The incorporation of the novel written in English to the Indian literary sphere not only subverted the traditional view of the novel in Western terms, but also opened up the way for a new social and historical perspective on Indian society, history, culture and language.

> If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. It reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (Bhabha 2006: 43)

The so-called "subaltern", the colonized, the repressed, the marginalized, the Indian become the subject of "representation" and "re-presentation"[25] when through the narrative their condition, their identity and their historical self are provided a new space for expression. Following Deleuze and Foucault's theoretical standpoint on the relation between theory and practice as active processes which set each other in motion, Spivak takes the argument a little further. The subject must be able to both speak for itself (representation) and act according to its understanding of itself (re-presentation). Indian writing in English seems to be doing precisely this.

> An important point is being made here: the production of theory is also a practice; the opposition between abstract 'pure' theory and concrete 'applied' practice is too quick and easy. But Deleuze's articulation of the argument is problematic. Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art of philosophy. Since theory is also only 'action,' the theorist does not represent (speak for) the oppressed group. Indeed, the subject is not seen as a representative consciousness (one re-presenting reality adequately). These two senses of representation – within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject predication, on the other – are related, but irreducibly discontinuous. (Spivak 2010: 28)

Having gained an outsider look on India, the diasporic or displaced Indian as writer is able to use the parts of his/her ancestral culture he/she can associate with his/her current self, to coherently articulate into his/her socio-cultural perspective an idea of the homeland. The language and form used in his articulation of self and cultural identity is simultaneously inherent in the writer as a postmodern affirmation of the state of the world and of the former post-colonial condition, as much as it is an exercise in the historical reassessment of the Indian identity. The writer is endowed with the freedom to re-invent historical constructs according to imaginative processes. The meeting of fact and fiction opens up new formal historical and aesthetic possibilities of exploring the past and its meanings.

So in postmodern literature and in what Rostek has called "postmodern histories" there has been a de-centering of power from dominant groups to former marginalized groups,

[25] Spivak's distinction between the process of "representation" and "re-presentation" adds an interesting perspective to my argument.

from ‘self’ to ‘other’ or from the Occident to the Orient and a deconstruction of the traditional, Eurocentric idea of history. But the world has also undergone a scattering of power foci to such an extent that it seems as though the actual notion of power has also been dissolved. It exists as merely a formality. But this is not necessarily so. What has in fact occurred is that power is re-asserted within the subject who in turn has been situated in a historical context. There is now, it seems, a place for everyone in the realm of the historical. Opening history to all social subjects means the re-interpretation, re-presentation and re-construction of history. This process involves creating a new form of expression through which the world can make sense of itself. “To reinsert the subject into the framework of its parole and its signifying activities (both conscious and unconscious) within an historical and social context is to begin to force a redefinition not only of the subject but of history as well.” (Hutcheon 2004:159)

It is interesting to consider in what ways is fiction closer and a more genuine as a depiction of how we, as subjective human beings perceive the world than history writing. Our perception of reality and the language we employ to make sense of the world and describe it, making it comprehensible for the sake of ourselves and others is the constant working of fiction. Our experience of the world is our narrative and is given form through the connection of the imagination and experience through cognition, and in a constant process of recreation. For this reason, history can be written and re-written from many different perspectives, in many different ways and through different linguistic means. Each version of history is different from the other and as works of fiction, no one can claim validity over the others. For having lost its point of reference and moved into the realm of subjectivity, “Postmodern art is more complex and more problematic than extreme late modernist auto-representation might suggest, with its view that there is no presence, no external truth which verifies or unifies, that there is only self-reference” (Hutcheon 2004:119).

The postmodern novel is establishing a political and philosophical position for itself perhaps because of the incoherent world we inhabit, or perhaps because a democratization of historical circumstances has worked itself into academic, political and economic analysis, or further yet, perhaps because the world is lacking in the interpretation that is able to most faithfully give it the meaning we, as social and historical reflective beings need. And so new forms keep emerging.

Power perspectives have shifted and readapted from a traditional fixed core to become inclusive of other more marginal perspectives, as I had referred earlier in the text. And history has moved closer to fiction in that it is understood as a narrative of experience whose reading may be more valuable as a document of the philosophical and political circumstances that produced and which define the content, tone and perspective. Postmodern novels' ideological position rests on the claim that history is recreated through fiction and that fiction is the result of historical processes. To further consolidate this thought, narrative discourses be they historical or fictional or a combination of both are also culturally bound. Our understanding, interpretation and writing of the past is always defined by socio-cultural realities. "As in historiographic metafiction, the lesson here is that the past once existed, but that our historical knowledge of it is semiotically transmitted." (Hutcheon 2004:122)

There can be no single official historical account of any past event, as the world is only viewed through a lens of subjectivity, and when realities which are a mere flash in the present are stored as memory and experience, they are transposed into the sphere of the past. Once moved into the past, the accessing of any information is like opening a book and reinterpreting what is written as a cognitive and imaginative process. Moments are stored in our memory and subjective consciousness fosters (re)interpretation through imaginative construction, also connected to our emotions. In this sense, everyone is both a protagonist and an analyst of history, just as every detail is relevant in the construction of a coherent understanding of the self. And the construction of the self is a fundamental aspect in the search for identity in the context of nation. History cannot be an objective science because it is the product of time. As Gifford writes, "Science, I'm afraid, will continue to have trouble with human memory because science aspires to be predictive as well as descriptive, and memory insists on the personal spaces of its anarchy, defying description, let alone prediction." (Gifford 2011: 31)

Time and chronology are irrelevant in the (re)construction of truth, just as the value of truth itself becomes fluid in the process of reconstructing history. I can conclude this chapter along the lines of Gifford in his analysis of memory when he quotes Augustine in an idea which I consider as a summary of the value of consciousness in the understanding of history as a personal and subjective, imaginative recreation of experience:

It is now, however, perfectly clear that neither the future nor the past are in existence, and that it is incorrect to say that there are three times – past, present, and future. Though one might say: "There are three times – a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future." For these three do exist in the mind, and I do not see them anywhere else: the present time of things past is memory; the present time of things present is sight; the present time of things future is expectation. (Augustine 1963: XI: 20, 273)[26]

Though the past is what paved the way for present and future circumstances and determined the form through which a story is told, when reconstructing that same past, "narrative truth may matter more than the "historical truth" (Gifford 2011: 32). In the reconstruction of events, memory as a cognitive process is the key to understanding experience in the individual enabling each one of us to recreate our own history through the creative powers of the imagination. When extended beyond the individual to involve the collective, historical memory is the tool through which a people can connect as one in the formation of a nation with a past that involved all the processes that lead to the creation of a common identity, no matter how complex, as a culture. And again, because identity is such a complex matter, it is through the understanding and piecing together of every small particle that composes the whole that a national history becomes complete.

What we are dealing with is the production of narratives. And there is not one single narrative but numerous and unaccounted for possibilities for narratives. As such, experiencing, understanding and recreating life and the world is a fictional process. I conclude by quoting Terry Eagleton in his article on Utopias:

The point is that history is malleable enough for us to choose. No sooner had the political theorists of the 1990s proclaimed that history was at an end than two aircraft slammed into the World Trade Center, and a whole new historical narrative began to unfold. History may not have been improved by this development, but it certainly didn't stand still.[27]

[26] In Gifford 2011:23

[27] Terry Eagleton "Utopias, past and present: why Thomas More remains astonishingly radical" (2015) *The Guardian* https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/16/utopias-past-present-thomas-more-terry-eagleton (accessed 16/06/2016)

Because history is not a form, but a process, and as such always renewable and re-workable, like, culture.

2

Situating the novels in postcolonial critical theory and its ongoing discussion

"The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns the loss into a language of metaphor." (Homi Bhabha)

"If history creates complexities, let us not try to simplify them." (Salman Rushdie)

Decolonization, postcolonialism and the narratives of identity

The idea of the postcolonial novel and the postcolonial subject emerges in the socio-cultural and political context of decolonization and as the circumstantial outcome of the newly found possibility for freedom of expression of former colonized subjects. The postcolonial quest explored a discourse for a national, cultural, social or linguistic identity, following the imposing effects of colonial presence and the unsettling effects of decolonization and all the social and political changes that these historical periods involved. The many different processes that characterized this period became the subject of national artistic expression from a new emerging group of artists. In this chapter I am focusing on fiction as artistic and cultural expression of the postcolonial, and the supporting theory through a case study of Roy and Desai's two novels.

In the decades following the Second World War up until about the 1980's, the world went through the process of decolonization as well as other complex historical processes which produced much theory on social and cultural phenomena. This was a time of great political, social and cultural unrest in both Oriental and Occidental[28] systems of thought and structure. Whereas in Chapter 1, the term, *structure* was used to describe the socio-political and administrative systems such as the laws, the codes according to which a nation or society

[28] "Occidental" and "Oriental" are here applied not as my own, but as Said's terms and to contextualize my debate as a continuation to the discussion begun in Chapter 1, as a representation of the division of the world into the binary oppositions of colonized and colonizer, dominant and dominated, European and Afro-Asian, etc, however, these are not defining terms which I use in my own discourse.

operated, in this chapter it is used in a purely sociological sense. The social divisions, values and characteristics which compose a society and define the behaviour and relations between its social agents are the structures I am referring to. When in this chapter I discuss the narrative techniques the authors apply, I may also refer to these as (narrative or literary) *structures*.

India, an ancient land and culture re-emerged, like other Caribbean, Asian and African nations, following an era of imperialism in a struggle to restructure itself as a politically and culturally unified nation. New nations now saw the possibility for a new social and political order, for the creation of the ideal of a democratic state and all it implied with the end of colonialism. The rise of a new national identity would involve fusing new concepts – political, social and cultural – with ancient customs and cultural roots. This emphasis on cultural roots in a direct confluence with uprising traditions would be the backbone to the emergence of revised vision of the nation. Therefore, the decades that followed India's independence were a time to re-assess and to re-organize society, administration and cultural habits so as to (re)build a "new" nation where the past, present and future could blend in social and cultural (dis)harmony and creative conflict.

Rebuilding a nation, following colonialism, meant the re-appropriation of those values and traditions which had existed and had made sense prior to the arrival of European settlers and the introduction of their system of thought, politics and education. With re-appropriation, I mean the claiming of a nation's identity and history through internal rather than external motivations. This meant the search for a history that made sense to the Indian people as a nation, based on a local rather than foreign cultural, and philosophical system of thought. The cultural dilemma is that the introduction of new models coming from external sources may result in the assessment of ancient practices as naïve and useless in modern society. But on the other hand, the partial or total abandonment of innate traditions in favour of borrowed and adapted ones meant the end of that which makes cultures unique. The need to follow globalized cultural standards has resulted in the homogenization of societies and cultures rather than in the acknowledgment of diversity as a positive and fundamental factor in a world characterized by difference. Cultural elements which make up a society and which should be

preserved are elements such as the practice of rituals and traditions, languages[29], art, religion and social organization. Though there are violent ritual practices which cannot and should not be maintained in a stable democracy based on social and religious equality, and many have been in great part abolished, knowledge and a collective memory of these practices as elements in the construction of a national culture and identity should be preserved. Therefore, the construction of a new society must go hand in hand with the reconstruction of a new ideal of society, whereby the past is not lost, but re-worked and adapted to present circumstances.

Along with readapting ancient practices, the re-organization of a nation also meant the re-assessment of these older values and an understanding of how they might be incorporated into both a new vision of society and how this ideal may be coherently incorporated into the universal map. So how could India, or any other new emerging nation, be culturally unique and preserve its roots while being part of the global political, social and economic scheme? The encounter of cultural ideals, of Eastern and Western standards, the opening up to new systems of thought and the expression of social freedom as a general principle, in practice had to result to the adapting and repositioning of old values to welcome new ones and of the fusion of the two for something completely different. So how is this possible and how do *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The God of Small Things* exemplify this process of cultural and ideological change?

Cultures and cultural systems that define societies are not static processes. Cultural forms and expression are constantly undergoing change, adapting to new social, political and economic realities, whether more restrictive such as in the case of colonialism, or more liberating such as in the case of decolonization. Creative impulses may be understood as the collision of ideas and concepts which emerge as a result of the political or social circumstances, or at a more individual level, as the product of emotional states. Through these conditions new forms and modes of expression arise which receive attention from a global audience. New cultural manifestations are also the result of the fusion of cultures, languages, artistic forms and the use of technology in the expression of culture which make them more easily available to a foreign audience. And once these new artistic forms reach new audiences

[29] In the case of India, there are hundreds of vernacular languages and dialects, so there is not which represents that nation, its people and diversity as a whole, although Hindi may be the most spoken language of India.

and awaken an interest in the culture that is producing them, a demand for more is set in motion. So the trend, especially since the outset of the globalization of cultural practices and production, has been to expand beyond abstract and geographical borders. In this sense, boundaries and dividing lines between cultures are further and further blurred or dissolved with this interworking of cultural practices and production. Cultures are on exhibition and being reworked at home, from home to the world, and from new homes to the world. This dispersion which altogether results in a re-definition of identity is a fundamental trait of the world today.

One of the side effects of globalization has been the exploitation of cultures and production to the point where everything is available to anyone anywhere, regardless of meaning or authenticity. Cultural and historical realities have become symbols, metaphors for any ideological claim.[30] This claim, however, is in itself controversial, for what is authentic in any culture that has undergone external influences, and how can cultural production not be meaningful in whatever shape it comes, if it serves the purpose of uncovering and understanding the past?

In contemporary society cultural forms and practices, in part, lose their distinctive traits to become diffused through globalization. The easy access to all sorts of cultural forms and practices, be it through the visual arts, fashion, music, literature, gastronomy, film, etc results in a society where the internationalization and the democratization of cultures has taken place. Ultimately, and from a more pessimistic point of view, the world will eventually perceive and treat cultures as mere commodities as globalization works its way further into societies and the melting pot widens. The disappearance of languages, of crafts and traditions, especially the more rural ones, in exchange for more industrial mass produced or artificial products or international languages such as EIL or ELF[31] are examples of cultural changes which have followed decolonization and have gained form and momentum in a world ruled by globalization.

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[30] As an example of this statement, the Ganesh is today used as decoration for yoga centres, vegetarian restaurants, t-shirts, sold in tourist shops, etc, in almost any context but its genuine one – a Hindu deity.

[31] Here I am referring to English as an International language and English as a Lingua Franca where standard linguistic structures do not apply or matter, because the main purpose of using English in international contexts is for easy communications at a global level.

These transformations have been taking place since decolonization and especially with the increasing mobility and recent developments in technology which began in the 1980's and especially in the last twenty years. And although we are witnessing a homogenization of difference, the accessibility of culture also empowers diversity, a reality and characteristic of contemporary culture. Besides, as previously mentioned, and I emphasize and repeat this idea throughout my thesis, culture is fluid and changeable, as well as porous. Culture and cultures will never stop transforming and adapting to the constant changes the world goes through. This fascinating changing form of culture is a characteristic and a quality which should be interpreted as a benefit for mankind, for as long as cultures evolve at the same speed as societies, they become more accessible as a global product. This accessibility of cultures provides an understanding of the world today and through it a key into the past. Furthermore, the globalization of culture not only implies the development of production, but also the demand for the indigenous. Art and culture in general, the economy and society all benefit from cultural diversity and the integration of traditional forms as a fundamental part of contemporary life.

The opening up to diversity within the artistic fields and the desire for a heterogeneous society of equal opportunities was a characteristic social phenomenon of the late 20th century. Western ideals in the second half of the 20th century demanded equality at all levels: racial, political, social, economic, etc. As Western societies witnessed the arrival and settlement of new groups on their land with their cultural differences in the same way new forms and habits were assimilated into both the migrant and host communities. With the second diaspora, South East Asian communities settled into Anglophone societies in the United States, Canada, Britain and Australia. The social and cultural transformations that these transnational movements brought about had significant influences on the definition and expression of both Western and non-Western cultures.

The cultural changes that take place and from which society and its people are able to benefit from, as a result of imperial expansion, are what I call the positive outcome of colonialism. The possibility for migration that followed the political independence of India (as well as of many African and Caribbean nations), the transformations in language which helped in the development of the nation state, the changes in social structure and education

and in the political system are examples of these positive changes; changes which help in the country's development.

Colonialism and imperial expansion had a strong negative impact on dominated societies and peoples. Colonial subjects suffered with the loss of autonomy, the violence, the imposition on and the exploitation of their land and people. Colonial subjects were denied personal and national freedom, often through brutal and violent means.[32] With the colonizers came another system of culture, administration and education imposed on the colonized people, having their own system of beliefs and thought regarded as futile, backward and inferior. But the violence and subjugation experienced through this encounter resulted in the development of the former colonized nations, though a fragmented development, through a vision of Western ideals. The fact that Western powers still dominate the world is unchallengeable and I don't see this fact as a necessarily positive one. The white man as historical circumstance has proven is no saviour and despite positioning *him*self on the top end of the hierarchy of civilization, is capable of as much barbarity in the attainment of his goals as any other race or culture of the world. What I can argue in favour of imperial expansion is that in its internationalization of Western policies equal opportunities for development were created in non-Western countries. If we do live in a Western governed society, then why not give way for the argument that African, Asian or other non-Western cultures and societies gathered power and authority over their nation and culture through the adoption of Western political, economic and cultural practices. Not all cases were successful and there is still a lot of violence and conflict in African countries, especially because of the survival of tribal conflict, political corruption and the unequal distribution of wealth. However, the opportunity for democratic development was created.

The opening up of borders, the transnational movement of people, the diffusion of cultural products, and the assimilation of new globally accessible forms and practices into all different societies of the world is known as globalization. It is the making of the unfamiliar, familiar, through its accessibility, and the absorption of foreign forms into everyday life. As a result of globalization Western, mostly American, practices, forms and products become

[32] Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) to mention but one celebrated text depicting the horror and brutality of colonialism in the Belgian Congo.

inherent to previously considered indigenous cultures. *The God of Small Things* provides many examples of how globalization had invaded India, but Roy was a harsh critic of globalization. In sum, despite the negative aspects of globalization and the internationalization of Western forms, the fusion of tradition, the emergence of new literary, musical and artistic modes of expression, the introduction of new models of education, language and administration, and the hope for a new universal democracy where all nations would be able to work alongside each other on equal terms were a few of the ideals that arose with the end of colonialism.

Along the same line, the colonial ideal of a homogenized world, structured on the image of Europe (also an idealized vision of the old continent and its Victorian values) was eradicated as new social groups who defended personal, social, gender related, sexual or racial ideals gained an active voice speaking out politically or expressing themselves through art. Here I am referring to identity groups such as immigrants, different ethnic and racial groups, sexual minorities, women, as well as other socially detached groups who had previously been pushed aside, outcast by society, denied a voice and rights, and who especially after the 1960s began to vindicate their rights, to value their difference and to map out a place for themselves through art as activism or resistance as well.

India is today considered the world's biggest democracy because of the size of its population and because the democratic state that was established following independence has managed to survive till today and seems to be the guiding political principle for a huge population, a fifth of the world total. Despite the State of Emergency that was declared between 1975 and 1977 during the rule of Indira Ghandi, Partition which led to violent clashes between in India and Pakistan and other ethnic conflicts, it is a fairly peaceful nation that has never suffered a long dictatorship or a fundamentalist rule. It is, nevertheless, a nation marked by a social hierarchy which induces inequality. Caste division, despite being an ancient Hindu system of hierarchy, socially recognized by the nation's leaders, in close association with religion, heritage and cultural traditions represents a model of social inequality. The suffering and injustice inflicted on victimized social, religious or ethnic groups was never recognized by those who dominated or imposed power. The violence felt by the dominated people was understood as deserved and so justified. It was only with Independence and the influence of

Western ideals that these social structures which characterized society, but which were nevertheless unjust, were eliminated. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the British used this social division to their own advantage and so empowered it further[33]. This social hierarchy has now been abolished and whereas in the past, former Untouchables had no legal or social rights, today they are regular citizens just as everyone else in Indian society. And as mentioned in the previous chapter, Untouchable, or Dalits are now able to re-write their own history, have an active part in Indian society and in cultural production and have started a literary movement[34].

"The circulation of Dalit literature in America is important to deconstruct an idea of India that is pervasive, and one that many diasporic Indians seek to cultivate: India as non-violent, Hinduism as mythological, anti-orthodoxy and benevolent, and both as peace-loving," says Toral Gajarawala, an associate professor at NYU. "The knowledge of India that circulates in the West is caste-free. Dalit studies offer a corrective to this 'idea of India' in an important way."[35]

Following the end of British imperialism in India a movement of Indian writers emerged not only from the homeland, but from all corners of the world to which Indians had spread through emigration. These narratives were important to the understanding of Indian culture, society and history, opening the doors to and broadening the horizon on the Indian reality at home and abroad. Indian literature written in English has caused and continues to raise much debate on authenticity and cultural ownership of India because what these novels have essentially been doing is not necessarily portraying the immense reality of the nation, its culture, social problems and people, but creating an idea of India. Perhaps because this "idea

[33] In African colonies there was no consideration of social division as all the indigenous people were treated as slaves, in a non-human, violent fashion.

[34] Dalit literature is a literature by Dalit (Untouchable) writers who speak of their experience. There are ancient traces of Dalit literature, both poetry and prose, but it grew especially after the 1960s. With continuing interest in Dalit literature it may gain as much importance as African American literature has in the exposure of slavery, racism and inequality for black people in the United States. It is not written in English but is translated into English from different Indian languages. Some better known names in the Dalit movement are: Om Prakash Valmiki, Mohandas Naimishray and Kanwal Bharti. One of the main narrative forms used in Dalit literature is the autobiography. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/deep-focus/Dalit-literature-goes-global/articleshow/46810541.cms (accessed 16/06/2016).

[35] Martand Kaushik (2015, April 5th) "Dalit Literature Goes Global" in *The Times of India.* (accessed at http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/deep-focus/Dalit-literature-goes-global/articleshow/46810541.cms)

of India" is the author's reality of the nation they know, a reconstruction of the past through the experience of the present. Therefore, another important aspect of this thesis is to contribute to the discussion of how the idea of India is constructed through narratives. And how this idea becomes an object of analysis and perspective on the nation's culture. Furthermore, how can the two novels I have chosen for this debate be understood as important documents in the search for a national and cultural identity and in the construction of the image of a nation through literature in the world today.

The focus of this chapter is fundamentally aimed at exploring the cultural, literary and linguistic aspects of the novels by Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai which may provide further knowledge on Indian identity. Subsequently, understanding how these novels are integrated into the theoretical debate on postcolonial literature, and the *formulas* which define it, is another important point to discuss. Postcolonialism can be located within the postmodernist and poststructuralist debate. So situating the narratives within the logic of these theoretical movements is an important step in the interpretation of the novels. Although in this thesis I am dealing with the work of these two female Indian writers who write in English, I do make references to other Asian, African, American or Caribbean writers, as well as to social, cultural or even political perspectives which may be relevant to my discussion.

My approach here is to define the theoretical stance the narratives follow and represent through an exploration of form, content, and context. Situating these narratives within a theoretical framework helps to understand the motivations behind their creation as well as how social, cultural and political changes are expressed through art, in this case, literature. The discussion and critical reading goes in two directions. One is incoming, while the other is outgoing. Let me explain my use of these terms. On the one hand, theory emerges as a result of the social and historical circumstances and how they are expressed or exposed, outgoing. On the other hand, cultural form and artistic expressions are the reflection of the social and political changes and an appropriation and assimilation of theoretical perspective resulting from political and historical circumstances, therefore, incoming.

Postcolonialism is the term applied in the theoretical discussion used to define an ongoing period and the socio-political as well as cultural movements that followed the end of colonialism and which affected a large part of the world and its rising nations. I have chosen

to use the unhyphenated form of the term in support of the idea that this is essentially a cultural period and not just a period which followed another, colonialism. However, when I do use the hyphenated form, it is because I am referring to the era that followed colonialism and not just the cultural movement alone. The social, political and cultural phenomena that characterize postcolonialism include the transnational movement of people of different ethnicities, the re-organization of nations and the social, cultural and linguistic transformations that occurred all over the world in Eastern and Western societies at large. These were all forces which marked this era and which led to the rise of postcolonial cultural production, creativity and theory. The literature that emerges at this historical moment, in particular from new and rising writers of post-colonial nations like India, has added, not only extra flavour to the cultural scene, but also interesting critical angles to further develop the debate.

Postcolonialism is also an evolving and complex concept, as the social and political realities which initially defined the post-colonial scene are pushed further back in time. How postcolonial theory and cultural expressions are understood today is different from how they were perceived in the aftermath of decolonization. Today, the postcolonial debate looks at the value of emerging cultures and social groups and emphasizes the attempt of recognizing social, racial and class equality for everyone. In postcolonial literary theory, significance is placed on contemporary literature which portrays social and cultural changes in both Western and non-Western societies. Using contemporary North American literature and culture as an example, fictional narratives are important documents of cultural heritage in a changing world. For example, Toni Morrison or Alice Walker write about the experience and inheritance of slavery in African American society and identity such as in *Song of Solomon* (1977) *Beloved* (1987) or Walker's *The Colour Purple* (1982). Jhumpa Lahiri writes about the experience of Indian and Pakistani families in American societies as well as the identification with the former homeland in her first book of short stories *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and in her novel, *The Namesake* (2003). Philip Roth writes about the experience of the Jewish population in *Goodbye Columbus* (1959) his first novel, and in his prize winning *American Pastoral* (1997) among many others, while Jeffrey Eugenides traces

Greek roots in his controversial *Middlesex* (2002). This is just to mention a few examples of how novels deal with identity in diasporic and postcolonial settings.

For diasporic writers, the cultural signs which define the characters as belonging or as having belonged to a specific nation become blurred and mixed, causing a sense of detachment and disorientation in new social, cultural and geographical contexts. However even though the postcolonial text is not bound to rewriting and reinterpretation of history, writers still go in search of historical identity and cultural roots creating the imaginary homelands to which they feel they belong and to which they attribute the identity they hold onto. The postcolonial today, whether in the diaspora or in India, is also the everyday individual in society living and struggling with everyday life, and with the realities that colonialism and the end of colonialism carry. It is this detachment from the core, this fragmented cultural state that characterizes the postcolonial today, but which also provides a way back into a nation's history. The cultural displacement and disorientation felt today by many of the world's migrant population, whose 'exile' or diaspora was somehow imposed on them or is a consequence of decolonization, a symptom of the postcolonial and a characteristic of postmodernism. And in a similar yet different way, those in the homeland struggle speak of the realities they are dealing with every day in India.

Difference has been the core ingredient in the defining of history. As I analysed in the previous chapter, it was difference in its many forms encountered during British imperialism in India: racial, linguistic, civilizational, religious, social and cultural, that provided the circumstantial justification for colonialism and then for the restructuring of the postcolonial nation. It was racial, religious and linguistic difference that led to the suppression of indigenous cultures and prejudice towards local practices and knowledge. The grand majority of European leading minds of the time refused to accept or recognize non-Occidental cultures of native people of the lands occupied as equal or even as 'culture', or even as meriting any form of respect and recognition. Economic, political and military objectives overpowered any sense of humanity. This was an accepted pre-conceived guiding law of colonization.

The unequal look and treatment of difference that characterized the colonial era still exists. It is through difference that the world and its diversity of cultures are perceived and function as a whole in present times. And though colonialism is in the past, the complexities

of colonialism still define human thought and how societies are structured today. The preservation and dissemination of cultural diversity is intrinsically woven into political ideologies and schemes, functions according to the global and national economy, and is inseparable from national interests. The vision of difference which colonial powers used in an attempt to dominate *primitive* people through the homogenization of cultures in the European ideal, and which still today persists in neo-colonial mentalities, survived and re-emerged taking on a new form of expression. Difference, which once was the primary motivation for violence and oppression, is still today a powerful tool used in creative and liberating ways, but also for violent purposes.

Searching for a definition of postcolonial Indian Literature

The adoption of a literary and linguistic form modelled on the European ideal was in some way recognition of the power of the British language and of the European literary genre to reach an audience beyond national borders on the part of the Indian literary elite. This was an Orientalist perspective assumed both by the British, in their imposition of cultural standards, as by the Indian educated groups who chose to adopt English and the English style novel within their literary tradition. On the other hand, it was a political tool and marketing strategy on the part of both nations and cultures in the construction of the Indian identity or identities for a mainly Western audience. Cultural and linguistic differences, as well as historical perspectives, were markedly and deliberately exposed in the early postcolonial novels such as *Midnight's Children* and widely accepted by the British, as by other Western readers. And it was precisely with this emphasizing of difference expressed through a familiar form and language that national and cultural values in former colonized and colonizer society's came to be re-assessed while meanings and forms redefined within Indian identity.

Indian Writing in English is today a legitimate and recognized expression of Indian contemporary culture as much as any other literature in Hindi, Tamil, Malay, Urdu or Gujarati. Whereas vernacular literature has existed for centuries, Indian English literature, "anglophone" literature, Indian writing in English and all the other names that have been used

to classify this form, have granted the world and its readers, especially in the Occident, a new vision, a new perspective of Indians in the world and of how Indians perceive themselves. In sum, it has given the world the possibility to reconstruct an idea of India and Indian people in contemporary Western societies or in post-colonial India. This is not to say that other literatures are not equally, if not more important as symbols of Indian identity, but the postcolonial novel in English[36] has been the most influential movement of writers from the Indian subcontinent to successfully spread Indian culture to the rest of the world in its original format (without translation).

To continue the discussion begun in the first chapter, Said's *Orientalism* (1978) provided the world with the first cultural and theoretical reading of the relation between Orient and Occident. This analysis emerged as pioneering critical theory which defined how the Orient was perceived by Western societies. It represented a pillar in critical perspective which would later be challenged, not only by Occidental, as by Oriental readers, thinkers and critics. Orientalism as a theoretical approach to the East, Eastern Studies and Eastern cultures was a way of classifying and interpreting the "other" according to a Eurocentric logic motivated by a history of imperial power, expansion and domination over others. As the dividing line between the Orient and Occident has lost its rigidity or clarity, this Orientalist logic also needs to be reassessed. Political and economic systems all follow similar principles, though differing in ideology. And some nations have proved to be more successful than others at maintaining peace and democracy since the end of the 2nd World War in 1945 and later the Cold War in 1989. The truth is that the world was "Westernized" and now globalized, an apparently more all-inclusive term to describe the international situation today. Whereas Said argued that "political imperialism governs an entire field of study, imagination, and scholarly institutions – in such a way as to make its avoidance an intellectual and historical impossibility,"(Said 1995:15) I will also add that the social, political and economic systems that shape Western societies today also govern artistic, theoretical, linguistic and cultural expressions coming from an Orient position, even if in the diaspora, because "each humanistic

[36] With the exception of Tagore whose work was translated into English, and other languages, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 (the first time it was awarded to a non-European writer), and who is still today, possibly the most important Indian (Bengali) writer of all times. His work was important as it introduced changes to classical Bengali verse and in the diffusion of Indian literature and culture to the rest of the world.

investigation must formulate the nature of that connection in the specific context of the study, the subject matter, and its historical circumstances." (Said 1995:15).

The image of India represented in Indian Writing in English, as a part of the Orient Said theorizes about, is itself a narrative construction based on the perception of the authors as individuals and members of specific social groups. The social groups I am referring to are, in the case of Kiran Desai, a second generation Indian growing up between India and the USA, while Arundhai Roy was born and raised in India, but attended English language schools. Like them, each writer will have their own experience and background, and not only writers, but anyone. This individual identity also influences how the nation and the world are perceived and explored in the narrative. These two writers' visions and interpretations of India are not only reflections of the social and political circumstances they lived through, but also of the personal experiences that made them.

> Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text – all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient and finally representing it or speaking on its behalf. (Said 1995: 20)

If the Orientalists Said was referring to were external agents who created an image, gave voice and represented this 'exotic' place and its people, the so-called Orientalists today are, as Lau and Mendes have named them, re-Orientalist (2011), who are nonetheless also creating an image of India. Although the novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai are equally representations of the Orient, they are written by Orientals, rather than Orientalists. The theoretical analysis therefore shifts to an exploration of the artistic, textual and linguistic form of expression and how this narrative form reflects Orientalism today, though there are other underlying factors motivating their writing and publication too. These could be anything from political, commercial, economic objectives, or simply because these books and stories are fashionable right now.

Theorizing about new forms of expression in the literary arts, or what might today be known as "New" Literatures is a challenging and self-multiplying endeavour that keeps on raising many adjacent debates. An important tangent to the debate is the role and importance

of narrative strategies in the texts, which include the linguistic factor. The novels I am discussing as is known, are originally written in English as opposed to other national languages such as Hindi, Urdu or Bengali (to name a few) in India. In this sense, the Oriental and Orientalist forms of expression are combined and reworked into a hybrid product readily available for global consumption. Rushdie, Roy, Desai, Ghosh, Adiga, and many others are Indian novelists who write in a Western, now international language, for Western readers.

The Re-Orientalist theory proposed by Lisa Lau and Ana Mendes provides a coherent argument for this fact, as well as an interesting neo-Saidian approach to the contemporary Indian novel in English.

> Self-evidently, Orientalism still persists in both popular and institutional constructions of culture and identity, but has developed in a rather curious trajectory over the last few decades. One direction of particular interest has been identified and designated as 're-Orientalism' (Lau 2009), where 'Orientalis' are seen to be perpetuating certain and selected types of Orientalisms. Where Said's, Orientalism is grounded in how the West constructs the 'Orient ' and the 'Occident', re-Orientalism is based on how cultural producers with eastern affiliations come to terms with an Orient alized East, whether by complying with perceived expectations of Western readers, by playing (along) with them or by discarding them altogether. (Lau and Mendes 2011:1)

Re-Orientalism reminds us of how fragile identity and its conceptualizing is today. Cultures reemerge in new forms as a result of specific historical contexts, and reconstruct themselves within the logic of the constant flow and changeable nature of cultural and national identity. It is the effect of foreign influences, the continuous development of cultural production and the fluid nature of societies today that result in the ongoing re-defining of identity. The fluid nature of societies perpetuates a further complexity in this debate, the diasporic subject. Individuals and societies in the diaspora create an even further fragmented sense of the self when caught between cultural roots, tradition and progress, a nostalgia for the homeland, and a desire for a new identity that opens the path towards a hybrid culture.

Diasporic writers are expats who have opted for transnationality, leaving their homeland of India to African and Caribbean countries in the first diaspora and later with the second wave of migration, to Britain, Australia, and North America, and eventually other European countries. Because of the historical, sociological and political dimension by which

these writers' identities have been shaped they are attempting a new literary approach to describing their complex reality of 'mixed elements'. The mixed elements I am referring to are cultural aspects and influences from both the homeland and hostland. The diasporic subject, whether an individual or community, will adopt and assimilate Western forms such as language, eating, dress and other social habits into their daily practices, in the process of integrating themselves into a new society. In the same way, socio-cultural practices which are indigenous to the diasporic subject will also become cultural representations of the homeland in the new society, and be introduced for local consumption as well, as any other commodity. The diasporic writer provides an example of this commodification of culture.

Having left the homeland, or having been raised in a country other than their ancestral homeland, usually as second or even third generation Indians, these individuals are now writing from a new home, and depicting a new social reality which is reflected in their writing. On the one hand, it is a common feeling of migrant communities to want to return to their homeland, and because this desire is most of the times never fully realized it becomes an important and nurturing factor of identity. This involves a nostalgic search for the homeland through the poetics of belonging. But on the other hand, there is also a natural and sociological tendency to relocate the homeland and its traditions within the new society and within the everyday experience of social practices. In this sense, the homeland is transported into the present experience of reality as a representation and through a narrative reconstruction and adaptation. Narrative themes, therefore, may develop either through a poetics of displacement or longing for a historical and cultural past or heritage, or through the need to belong both in the new host society, and in the land of cultural origin. The writer in the diaspora may choose to adopt either of these themes or to reject them and create a new narrative, as Lau and Mendes have argued in the quote above.

According to Shusheila Nasta, literary poetics allows Indian diasporic writers to explore their feelings and experience of exile, displacement and immigration through the text, by moving "into a new architecture of deterritorialized imagination, enabling aesthetic configurations secure enough to contain, as well as to explore, the dialogic voices of a subversive discourse of postcolonial resistance" (Nasta 2002:40). As these migrants feel they have been uprooted from their ancient culture and introduced into a new cultural environment,

there is an overhanging sense of living at the periphery of both cultural spaces. Migrant communities tend to feel marginalized and not quite integrated into their host societies, while also feeling they no longer fully fit into the world they left behind. A new space for expression and identification is therefore opened. In the definition and exploration of this new identity, a new narrative consciousness is also born where the objective is not to be considered a marginal ethnic literary group, though in the contemporary state of affairs this may also be "chique", but to be recognized as a new dimension of the canon. In other words, to be considered a new outlook on both English and Indian literature. This new interpretation of Indian diasporic and contemporary identity will look for a celebration of past and present cultural and literary metaphors to gather meaning from a world on the path to meaninglessness. Most of the time fictional depictions of India are mere recreations, but nevertheless important keys to unlocking the past and present in the reconstruction and understanding of the world and identities. In doing so, these writers are also opening up spaces for new narrative voices and representations. "Frequent need, for example, of literary invention or, the desire to create 'imaginary homelands' always only partial and fragmentary recreations of the past lost (…)" (Nasta 2002:140).

So if diasporic writers and Indian English writers are helping to structure identity, re-construct lost homelands and redefine literary standards how are these novels and writers to be classified? Should the literary world consider national literatures in English[37] as a new form of English Literature, or as a branch of Indian national literature? On the one hand, defining, grouping and even naming emerging national literatures as "new" or "other" or "postcolonial" is classifying them as a distinct group, therefore as having characteristics which differentiate them from both the mainstream "English" or "American" Literatures and from Indian national literatures. On the other hand, classifying is a way of introducing the stigma these literatures carry, or the thesis they defend, like the title of an essay. It is also a way of detaching this literary and cultural form from a homogenous group. Classifying this

[37] The same argument applies to lusophone, francophone or other literatures of post-colonial nations which are written in the language of the former colonizers – Portuguese in the case of Angola, Mozambique, Goa or East Timor; French in the case of Senegal, Algeria or former French Caribbean islands as well as other former colonial powers.

writing as a branch of national literature however, has also raised debates on the value and authenticity of voice, form and language.

Postcolonial, or "new" literatures in English are rooted in their national and cultural history. They emerge and are acknowledged as "new" because of the historical process out of which they were formed. What is new in them is not so much the cultural, linguistic or narrative aspects they display, although these too are new as an Indian literary form, but it is a sign of the historical moment when these literatures are introduced to a global audience. The emergence of postcolonial literature is made possible because of clash of binary oppositions in which they are grounded; the indigenous and the foreign; the native and civilized; the old and new, the traditional and the modern or postmodern, the vernacular and the English. This encounter naturally results in the birth of new forms and new forms of expression. Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, as other South Asian writers who write in English, are themselves bicultural products if not multicultural beings, and their narratives deal with issues that are common in postcolonial contexts. Furthermore, the themes in their novels – the search for identity, the coming to terms with historical processes, the linguistic dilemmas, dealing with social (class and caste) difference in contemporary societies and other such themes, aspects which I will be discussing further in this chapter and the next, are represented and expressed not only through content, but also through style and narrative structure. All these themes, which I mentioned, and which are common in the postcolonial discourse, are new in the literary context and also represent a recent global phenomenon.

In his well-known essay "Dissemination" as well as in his Introduction to *Nation and Narration,* Homi Bhabha discusses the dissemination of cultural forms, 'liminality'[38] and hybridity. Nation and historical writing on nation as he argues are powerful Western political constructions. The concept of *nation* according to its present understanding has undergone some important transformations with decolonization, war, social and transnational mobility and the economic, political and geographical forces that define and divide the world today. The concept of nation, especially in the West where societies have become more multicultural due to the settlement of migrant communities, cannot be understood as a homogenized

[38] Liminality is an anthropological term used in initiation rites which means the passing from one stage to another. In postcolonial discourse it was first introduced by Homi Bhabha to signify the hybrid state people who have left their homelands and settled elsewhere experience.

"horizontal" community. Western societies are the end location of many immigrant groups such as Indians in London or New York who have left their homelands and have entered into a new social reality which has become the site for the production of new cultural metaphors.

Bhabha is not so much focused on identifying the diasporic writer himself or understanding what characteristics define diasporic narratives. He appears to be more concerned with understanding what constitutes the modern nation in the postcolonial context, and how this space becomes both the site of the production of identity and a product of the gathering of fragmented and displaced identities. Furthermore, he focuses on how this space is represented in the narrative.

> It is the cultural representation of this ambivalence of modern society that is explored in this book. If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitory history, its conceptual indeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies, then what effect does this have on narratives and discourses that signify a sense of 'nationness': the *heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliations; the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality; the blindness of bureaucracy, the strait insight of institutions; the quality of justice, the common sense of injustice; the *langue* of the law and the *parole* of the people.
>
> The emergence of the political rationality of the nation as a form of narrative – textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative strategems – has its own history. (Bhabha 1990: 2)

The 'ambivalence' of the modern nation is its lack of form and coherence in an increasingly unstable and unsettling society. The traditional idea of nation was a physical and ideological entity defined by a common language, a common sense of belonging of its people, with a shared system of beliefs. This is an ideological concept which has been challenged because of the changes and transformations the nation in both theory and practice has undergone. Defining the concept of nation today is an anthropological and historical process which involves the constant interpretation of narratives that speak of nation and *nationness*. The process of understanding what constitutes the nation, is in synchrony with the process of understanding what constitutes the contemporary narrative that identifies the nation as a space of belonging and of the production of cultural and national identity. Through the postcolonial narrative, therefore, the modern nation, society, established cultural forms and historical

processes are defined through metaphors and perceived as they really are – as fluid forms, ideas and concepts in constant re-creation.

> To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself. If the problematic 'closure' of textuality questions the 'totalization' of national culture, then its positive value lies in displaying the wide dissemination through which we construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life. (Bhabha 1990:3)

In order to understand the modern nation and how it is represented in literary texts, or to accept literary texts as openings to an understanding of the modern nation and changing cultural forms, it is necessary to deconstruct the idea of history as based on national and political events, philosophical and ideological thought breaking it down to include the smaller, everyday dimension as pieces to the construction of the whole. The exposing of the private in the understanding of the public, changing perspectives on difference and the accepting new ethnic and social groups not as marginal or minority groups but as equally important in the representation of society. Recognizing the importance of new social groups and movements within contemporary societies, and acknowledging their narratives is fundamental in the definition of cultural realities. It is through a broader and more abiding concept of nation that a deeper understanding of historical processes is obtained; one that will contribute to a fuller knowledge of the past, present and future of mankind.

This approach to understanding the socio-political reality of the nation places literature at the core of cultural processes. Fiction may give us a new insight into lost, unwritten histories which help to compose the bigger picture. But allowing for this conceptual flexibility is recognizing that historical processes and socio-political as well as cultural forms are undergoing constant re-creation. Referring back to my debate on historical writing in the first chapter of this thesis, as Bhabha claims, all processes are ongoing because each actor is its own agent and producer of his/her own history and narrative:

> It is the project of *Nation and Narration* to explore the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation. This turns the familiar two-faced god into a figure of prodigious doubling that investigates the nation space in the process of the articulation of elements: where

meanings may be partial because they are in media res; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image. (Bhabha 1990:3)

The title of Bhabha's essay, "Dissemination" means, according to its etymological root, the scattering or spreading of something, in this case, of people and cultural forms. Dissemination also has the word "nation" within it. Here we are dealing with a more socio-political approach to the argument: the idea of the modern nation, being opened up, dissected and spread open to allow for the adjustment of new social realities. The point is to deconstruct the idea of the nation as a whole, a single unit, or of a central core with a common fixed origin. The nation is multi-layered and in ongoing reformulation of itself through imaginative and creative processes, external influences and socio-political as well as economic movements which impose changes. The third point on the meaning of the term is the interpretation of dissemination as the opening of a subject to widespread discussion and debate. Here we are dealing with the dissemination of ideas.

Throughout his discussion on the locality of culture, Bhabha is proposing readers and literary critics look for cultural representations of people and nation as expressed through "social and literary narratives". In the case of diasporic communities, the splitting of the subject as a single national entity occurs, opening up a new space for new cultural expressions and forms and for a new reading and understanding of identity and the narratives which from there originate. Moving between two cultural realities opens a new stage for the production of identity as postcolonial subject enter a new realm; what Bhabha has termed as 'liminality'.

The construction of the social and cultural identity involves a complex and ongoing process of transformation and adaptation of the self to a new society or a changing society. This identity is reinforced and sustained through personal narratives which connect a group of people within a culture or society, be it at home or abroad. Emphasizing specific social and cultural characteristics beyond the natural biological distinctions creates ethnic or marginal groups and identities. These can be accepted as an integrating, though exotic part of society, and in every big city there are visible examples of this such as in quarters where specific ethnic groups inhabit, or spaces where cultures are exhibited, or even the available range of cultural products and artefacts as passages into another culture and its people (restaurants,

markets, books, art, etc.). All the above mentioned examples of ethnic expressions are accessible and accepted as part of the Western city and mode of living. In the same way, Western, especially American, commercial and cultural products will be integrated into Indian society. Liminality is an integral aspect of contemporary society as a whole, affecting individuals of all ethnic and national characters. This cultural reality is the site for the production of cultural metaphors and the constant reconstruction of identities.

Cultural metaphors gain shape in everyday practices but are also the underlying structures of artistic expression, and are themselves represented creatively in art. In fiction, the homeland, just as the home is reimagined and reconstructed in many different ways, just as the collective practices that make sense in the preservation of culture are adapted to the communities in the hostland and in the homeland. The social practices and artistic expressions which help to strengthen cultural ties among individuals and communities in the homeland, in the hostland and transnationally, become fundamental in the construction of the cultural and national identity. Through the interplay and exchange of cultural forms in this 'in-between' space of liminality, as reflected in literary and linguistic structures, new meanings are generated and expressed providing new understandings and critical readings to the postcolonial debate. This liminality, or passing between two cultures and cultural forms, is an important aspect of postcolonial fiction as well, and one which helps in the understanding, the attributing of meaning and in the value of such literature.

India as a late 20th century socio-cultural reality, the Indian diaspora, historical and social processes as understood through subaltern groups and other aspects of Indian society, culture and history emerged with Salman Rushdie, especially because of the success of his novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), but also of other writers of his generation such as Amitav Ghosh (1956) and Anita Desai (1937), and the younger generations that followed[39] including the two authors I am discussing in this thesis. These are writers who write and publish in English through British or American publishers, or Indian branches of these publishing houses. They are read by an international audience, who welcomes their narratives and demands for more. Precisely because these novels are written in English and speak about

[39] It is important to refer the existence of earlier writers such as R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and V.S Naipaul, (of Indian ancestry though born in Trinidad and Tobago) who prior to Independence were already writing and publishing internationally in English.

realities which Western nations today can relate to, the social, political and economic transformations that the world as a whole is facing but in the experience of India, these novels have come to represent contemporary Indian society inviting readers to explore it through the socio-cultural and literary context which the writers have chosen. Evidently the novels represent gates through which an understanding of Indian society and culture is channelled. The narratives and themes explored as well as the portrayal of the people and culture of India are conceptual reconstructions of nation, culture and identity working through the imagination, but nevertheless powerful ideological tools as well. Historical perspectives are extracted and constructed from the fictional narrative and the literary contextualization provides a tool through which the past is uprooted and analysed. How can the value of authenticity and objectivity now be assessed when dealing with sources as subjective and fragile as fiction, one might ask? And what is the value of history as true and absolute when reconstructed through fiction? The postmodern and postcolonial debate challenges this notion of history and truth as absolute, unchangeable structures since the past and the present are constantly being reworked at all different levels, and new perspectives emerge which challenge or add to former narratives. Even the theory evolves provoking ongoing debates which raise even more thoughts and debates.

The postcolonial as a narrative form provides the theoretical perspective required for an approach to the text through its various angles. Firstly, the experience of the author is a major factor in the chosen literary strategies and effects. An individual, or a nation, who carry the historical weight of violence, war, suppression or abuse perceives and reacts according to the socio-political realities and heritage that define them. Their attitudes, beliefs, ideas and emotional development is different to those whose personal and national histories are free of oppression[40]. The hope in a new freedom and democracy that comes as a result of the historical burden of imperial subordination is reflected in the discourse, both political and creative of generations that experienced these social changes. Younger generations grew up and had their cultural and educational roots moulded by their parents' and grandparents'

[40] Jewish national identity, as an example, and how it is expressed is inevitably bound to the horror and traumatizing effects of the Holocaust. African Americans too, in the literature and music is also inseparable from the experience of slavery and racism in American societies. Trauma affects personal and national identities becoming a fundamental element in the construction of identity.

experiences and beliefs, whether by following them or reacting against them. As future generations are pushed further away from these socio-political realities because of the passing of time and the loss of interest in historical values, their motivations are directed elsewhere.

In the case of India, the emergence of new narratives from those whose voices and experience had once been suppressed, such as female, low caste or homosexual becomes an important space and medium for forming and strengthening identities. Making themselves heard, creating the proper space for the production of their narratives is also a way of declaring a right to assimilation in both national (Indian) and in Western societies and cultures. That is why it is important to have female, Dalit, diasporic, gay, Bengali, Gujarat, and all kinds of literary perspectives emerging in the formation of a broad perspective of national culture.

Following on from this thought, the experience of diaspora and the settlement in new lands changed perceptions of nationality and identity. As a result of contact with new Western societies, the idea of India was then further transformed with the passing or the fading of tradition down through generations. Individual approaches to and perception of these values, however, vary according to regional, linguistic, social and geographical experience. These notions, such as the awakening of new voices, the re-assessment of old values and the re-adjustment of new societies to the presence of diverse cultures are important aspects and recurrent themes of contemporary literature.

The postcolonial novel is generally associated with a culture or nation, but as literature it is, however, no longer defined according to a specific location or delimited by national borders, or as being written from within the geographical space which it is representing. Indian literature is not necessarily written from within India, as it is not necessarily written in an Indian language. Nor is it written by a writer who can outrightly claim to have been born and raised in India.

According to scholar, literary critic and writer Makarand Paranjapee diasporic creativity as understood through Indian writing in English raises a problem. In past decades, and especially since the publication of *Midnight's Children*, it is the diaspora which has been writing and representing India, the nation, people, language and culture. As diasporic communities attempt to preserve the Indian identity, they have held strong to an image of the homeland which they may no longer know, or symbols or metaphors in an attempt to hold

onto their roots. Again, the authenticity debate arises. But on the other hand, since travelling back to India, even choosing to reside in India has ceased to be an obstacle for most people who are 'foreign' Indians, the idea of India is no longer necessarily constructed from a fragmented version made up of small items, stories and inherited memories as described in Rushdie's "Imaginary homelands". The idea of India is constructed or recreated from personal experience of contemporary India and of the Indian diaspora, within the context of a more global understanding of society and culture as a whole. There are even writers who construct stories around the idea of visiting India for the first time or returning to India. Such is the case of Jhumpa Lahiri in her short story "The Interpreter of Maladies" (1999) and in her novel *The Namesake* (2004).

To add to this discussion there is also Vijay Mishra's broader take on diaspora:

> The distinction between the old and the new (diasporas) becomes clearer when we note that the 'new' surfaces precisely at the moment of (post)modern ascendancy; it comes with globalization and hypermobility, it comes with modern means of communication already fully formed or in the making (airplanes, telephone, email, the internet, videocassettes, DVD, video-link, webcam) and it comes, since 2003, with the gift of dual citizenship from India (the Indian citizenship act 1955 has been amended to allow the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Italy to retain dual citizenship). (Mishra 2007:3)

The understanding of diaspora and the implications this social phenomenon has on people and society has changed because of economic, technological and political changes at both national and global levels. Technological advances, the opening up of national borders and globalization have made cultures available anywhere. So whereas in the past the homeland was preserved as a fixed symbol out of which emerged the idea of a fixed identity, today these same concepts are a postmodern representation of a fragmented or hybrid cultural and historical construction of identity. Ethnic communities and cultural identities are built on representations of the homeland which acquire new symbolic meanings in contemporary society. But these interpretations are now no longer as much imaginary as in the past, but constructed and commercialized products because of the changes that society has undergone. The commodification of culture has a strong contribution and effect on how the idea of

homeland is constructed today. Ancient spiritual symbols, social customs and traditions as well as cultural forms (such as gastronomy, music and clothing) of India have been commercialized and uprooted from their context to gain new meanings in a multicultural, globalized society and world. The articulation of meanings or the narrative voice, rather, also expresses how ethnic groups interpret and experience their own cultural identities within modern societies, and how the homeland is experienced at home and from abroad.

I would not argue this is a negative aspect of diasporas because once again, culture and cultures are dynamic processes and new interpretations of social realities contribute to the liberalization and evolution of fixed ideologies and views. To use an evident example to support my claim, the term "Diaspora" is an ancient, biblical term used to describe the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt in search of a promised land. The term diaspora, however, has expanded its meaning and reference to embrace the mass movement of people of India, as well as other nations, to Africa, the Caribbean and later to the Anglophone nations.

> The recent opening up of the word to signify the lives of 'any group living in displacement' (Clifford 1994:310) is a phenomenon that probably marks a postmodern move to dismantle a logocentric and linear view of human affairs, essentialist notions of social and national cohesion that connected narratives and experiences to specific races and to origins: the model here was that of historical lexicography, of which the sublime example is the *OED* itself. (Mishra 2007:13) [41]

Diaspora today has been freed from its original meaning and has come to represent a postmodern phenomenon of uprooted people in search of a place they can call home with all the sociological, psychological and philosophical implications involved. But it is not as straight-forward, or linear as a process as it has been perceived. Diasporic people and communities, like all non-native residents of an urban centre, are the multicultural component of such a society. The most difficult task and many times the end objective for these people, who are always inevitably considered as foreigners, is adapting, feeling integrated and enjoying the same benefits, rights and moral respect as those who are native citizens rather

[41] According to Mishra, in the *OED* Diaspora refers to the Jews which is a culture specific and ideological definition of the term. Similar arguments have been raised on classifications such as "Commonwealth Literature" (Rushdie) and "Third world literature" (Gopal, Ahmad in their critique of Jameson, see pages 185-188) and the ideological imprint these terms have.

than feeling they occupy "a place with no foundation" (Roy 1997:192). Like the banana jam made in the "Paradise Pickles & Preserves" Estha and Rahel's grandmother had opened, sometimes diasporic, immigrant and second or third generation citizens of new societies belong neither here nor there.

> They used to make pickles, squashes, jams, curry powders and canned pineapples. And banana jam (illegally) after the FPO (Food Products Organization) banned it because according to their specifications it was neither jam nor jelly. Too think for jelly and too thick for jam. An ambiguous, unclassifiable consistency, they said. (Roy 1997:30)

This inability to feel fully immersed in a society and its social practices or of not being properly integrated due to still being considered as the "other" no matter how far socio-political views and mentalities have evolved, awakens feelings of longing for a lost or past homeland. The idea of the homeland which is created, can be unrealistic, or amplified according to some religious, cultural or political ideal. The distance from the original notion of the cultural ideal results in "fossilized" versions of the homeland. Diasporic people develop a sense of identity as pertaining to an 'imaginary homeland' recreated from a distance.

Mishra associates this cultural formation of the self with the emotional and psychological processes involved in mourning and trauma. In mourning, there is a need to fill the emptiness caused by the separation from a loved one, friend or family, or someone of symbolic importance in our lives. Migration can have a similar effect on individuals and communities caused by the separation from a land and home a group or individual identifies with and needs for their own emotional and social well-being. Diasporas, therefore become the site where a sense of belonging and an ideal image of the homeland is creatively reconstructed. In diasporic people there is a nostalgia or melancholy, a longing for something lost – family, home, places, customs or practices – a feeling of belonging and collectiveness which cannot be regained in its totality. Not being able to (re)capture that feeling in its essence and totality due to the absence, distance or displacement from the homeland and the familiar, this loss is recovered and replaced through a recreation of a homeland and a reordering of culture and cultural processes and practices in the diaspora.

This is a social, cultural and artistic process which can also have a political, religious or racial dimension, sometimes in the form of resistance, but also violent or more oppressive manifestations. Fundamentalist ideologies, groups and beliefs are formed precisely from a belief and an attempt at preserving the 'purity' of the national culture or religion. The idea of the homeland and the nation state from the diaspora is different from that of the people who "stayed behind". Although nowadays this reality has changed, in that distance and time have been physically and virtually reduced with technology and globalization, as I have already mentioned, it is still different to create an idea of the homeland than to occupy the space at home where cultural realities take shape. Going back to Mishra's theoretical stance, as in trauma, there is a moment in the past which is preserved, stuck in time. It is that moment of traumatic experience that becomes like a scar on our human tissue stunting emotional, social and psychological healthy development. There are moments, events or experiences that leave marks or are inscriptions in the course of any history and from which meaning is derived:

> In a purely practical sense it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem. Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house – the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture – must be resurrected from the ruins and examined. Preserved. Accounted for.
>
> Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story (Roy 1997:31-33).

In the case of diaspora and migration it is the moment of detachment, fuelled by the inability to fully adapt to a new society and culture that results in a permanence of nostalgia and longing for a lost home, and memories of the past, which is never fully recovered. But though never recovered or transported into the new reality its totality, memory, the 'imaginary homeland' becomes the driving force and the ground from which meaningful narratives are constructed as Roy says. In human memory, the past and specific moments of personal value are made intemporal through memory, through the reenactment of tradition, through the sharing of stories and through the passing down of cultural values. These memories, however,

are subjective interpretations of the past and culture which are changeable and mutable according to our own experience of the present, as discussed in the first chapter.

The importance of history and historical moments as both a personal and national experience is also explored in the beginning paragraph of *Midnight's Children:*

> I was born in the city of Bombay… once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from that date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th 1947. And the time? That matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more… On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. (Rushdie 2006:3)

Saleem, however, is an example of an unreliable narrator and one who is reconstructing his personal history alongside India's political history. He is an example of how the past is a constantly being evaluated and subjected to reconstruction and reinterpretation.

There are events and experiences in *The God of Small Things* which are traumatic for the twins, leaving marks on their lives and narratives, making it difficult for them to move away and move on from. Their narratives are a way of reconciling with the past. This attempt at understanding the past is represented through the cyclical return, or the jumping back and forth of the narrative as we (the reader) are constantly being returned to the moments surrounding Sophie Mol's death, the moments leading to Velutha's death and the moment of Estha's encounter with the Orangedrinksman. But the interpretation of this theme of trauma in Roy's novel can be stretched beyond its literal meaning to function as a metaphor for any kind of detachment such as death. "It is curious how sometimes the memory of death lives on for so much longer than the memory of the life that it purloined." (Roy 1997:16) The twins, Estha and Rahel keep returning or "being returned" to the death of their visiting cousin Sophie Mol. "Over the years, as the memory of Sophie Mol (the seeker of small wisdoms: […]) slowly faded, the Loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive" (Roy 1997:16). I have been making a parallel between the loss of a loved one in *The God of Small Things* to the longing of a homeland for diasporic people connecting both to the traumatic as defined by Mishra. It is in the construction created around the longing and loss, and in the feelings associated with

the desire for something rather than with its actual attainment, in this space that meaning is created. Desai describes this idea in her beautiful reflection on what love is,

> "Could fulfillment ever be felt as deeply as loss? Romantically she decided that love must surely reside in the gap between desire and fulfillment, in the lack, not the contentment. Love was the ache, the anticipation, the retreat, everything around it but the feeling itself." (Desai 2006:2)

It is this desire, this longing, this wanting but never fully gaining that provides meaningful experiences. This feeling of longing and loss lingers and is a constant presence in the construction of the narratives. In a similar sense, trauma is constantly re-experienced and relived and it is through this reenacting of traumatic moments that meaning and acceptance are shaped. The non-linear quality of the narratives being analysed in this thesis, narratives which keep returning to specific moments through different perspectives are creative ways of interpreting and understanding events – whether trauma, history, longing and loss.

Diasporic writers, as others, feel this loss deeply, this need to hold onto the past and to the distant, to grab onto the feelings it carried so as to give more sense to the present.

> It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into a pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (Rushdie 2010:10)

This passage from Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands" describes precisely what I am trying to show. The longing for a connection with the past, with the homeland or with specific meaningful events and moments which define us as human beings, are fundamental in the construction of a coherent sense of identity the social context we inhabit also undergo transformations. Individual identity is connected to the social, cultural and historical circumstances from which each one of us emerges and is moulded through personal interpretations of the past, based on both personal and national experience. The past, however,

is perceived through memory, and these are fictional constructions experienced in the present and become the cultural and literary metaphors through which individuals connect to each other and to an idea of the homeland.

These creative emotional constructions are parts of a puzzle which are fundamental in the understanding of diasporic cultures and identities. They are also essential elements in the writing of personal histories or historical narratives. A diasporic writer, or even a second or third generation immigrant who is writing, and who through his/her writing connecting with a culture or homeland, such as the case of Indian writers in Britain, the USA or Canada depict the homeland in their narratives. These depictions are metaphors of reality; fictional constructions of nation; narratives of belonging. Images of home and reflections of history are illustrated through geographies of spaces, portraits of family life, recreations of tradition, the emphasis on symbol, and the highlighting of meaningful experiences rendering these intemporal, preserved in time, like trauma, like a scab that is repeatedly picked not allowing the wound to heal, and creating a deep scar. Writers hold on to their Indian background, roots and identity in order to construct and create meaningful narratives through which identities are shaped and keep gaining shape in a globalized world which is constantly undergoing change. But in this process they are reworking the idea of the homeland according to the transformations in their own experience and identity. Roy, for example stopped writing fiction after *The God of Small Things* and dedicated her efforts to other types of writing. Her perspectives and experience changed, and so as a writer her objectives, and her narrative also changed. Jhumpa Lahiri recently moved to Italy and claims that "Rome has given me a sense of belonging"[42] and her latest book an autobiography, *In Altre Parole* (2016), as the title implies is written in another language, Italian. Her narrative has also evolved and changed, and so will her experience and construction of the homeland, the diaspora and Indian identity.

The identity that is created is in a continuous dialogue with both the Indian culture, as with the culture of the former colonizer, in the case of the diaspora with the host society or with the world in its globalized form. As Hellen Tiffin states, "Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridised, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and

[42] Pierce, Sheila (2015) "Why Pulitzer Prize-winner Jhumpa Lahiri quit the US for Italy" http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/25614298-in-other-words (accessed 17/06/2016)

epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity." (Tiffin 2006: 99) And the identity that is created is neither Indian, nor British nor American, but a new social reality with cultural and linguistic repercussions.

So, given that the world and its socio-political realities have changed the way cultural metaphors and literary realities are constructed and shape identities, classification and the ordering of structures and forms, just as of literatures, identities and cultures becomes a complex task. Defining cultural identity and situating this form within the discourse of nation is not a straightforward exercise. How national and cultural identity is expressed is free floating in form, open to change, malleable, permeable, and varied. It is not only unclassifiable, as it is in the most extreme of perspectives, a myth in itself – the myth of nation and nationality. The literature which expresses national identity is not necessarily circumscribed to one specific place of reference nor is it restricted to a language. Feelings of belonging have come to embody different forms of expression.

National literatures have been uprooted from the homeland to which they are related or identified with to being produced anywhere in the world, depending on the writer's experience. Not only are novels by new and successful South Asian, Caribbean or African writers emerging all over the world, in the writer's ancestral countries as in new host nations by diasporic, second, third or by now national citizens of the United States, Canada or Britain, but the cultures and nations they represent, whether in the ancestral homeland or in the host community, are coming to life through the narratives. But they are coming to life not because the narrative content is a straight forward exercise in the re-writing of history, nationhood and in the depiction of the stereotypes through which cultures are identified, but because the narrative itself is a metaphor of the transformations culture and national identity go through because of individual and collective experience. These new forms of representation of the homeland express cultural belonging to both worlds, as well as resistance and a counter culture to a dominant former colonial power and a reaction to a 'fossilized' view of history, culture, identity and of how an individual is assessed and classified in the world today.

Post-colonial literatures/cultures are thus constituted in counter-discursive strategies to the dominant discourse. The operation of post-colonial counter-discourse (Terdiman 1985)[1] is dynamic, not static: it does not seek to subvert the dominant with a view to taking its place, but, in Wilson Harris's formulation, to evolve

textual strategies which continually 'consume' their 'own biases' (Harris 1985: 127) at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse. (Tiffin 2006: 99)

Contemporary narratives today not only challenge the standard discourse of binary divisions, but expose the complex realities through which the world and its structures have been subverted. This intricate strategy involves both a questioning and challenging of former values and discourses, as also a shifting of positions and spaces of representation. The original core structure of dominance through which historical realities were understood, being the Eurocentric standard intellectual and linguistic perspective, has suffered a decentralization of power and authority, being forced to question its own fragile form. Because of the changes in the geographies of nation, physical and symbolic borders have been opened to welcome and incorporate new literary, social, linguistic and cultural realities. The core has expanded just as what may have once been considered periphery has migrated inwards and outwards, just about blurring all sorts of boundaries. And not only has the centre expanded to accommodate new realities, but former references have moved from the position of authority at the core of Western societies to new locations of important cultural processes and transformations.

Consequently, English literature and culture have become difficult terms to define theoretically as categories for the variety of postcolonial fiction that keep emerging from all over the world. Furthermore, the narrative and linguistic substance that once gave literary categories its meaning are no longer as geographically and linguistically contained as they were prior to decolonization, or even in the decades that immediately followed independence.

What seems to be happening is that those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it – assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers. (Rushdie: 2010:64)

This is not only true about the English language, as also about the English or European narrative form – the novel. The contemporary novel or postmodern novel is motivated by and is in itself a narrative which depicts in form, content and through its history a search for

identity(ies). The Indian novel or many diasporic novels which deal with themes of homeland and ancestral culture and belonging are narratives of national identity, which is itself a fragmented and complex concept. This is the ground on which its essence is focused.

> One of the rules, one of the ideas on which the edifice rests, is that literature is an expression of nationality. What Commonwealth literature finds interesting in Patrick White is his Australianness; in Doris Lessing, her Africanness; in V.S. Naipaul, his West Indianness, although I doubt that anyone would have the nerve to say so to his face. Books are almost always praised for using motifs and symbols out of the author's own national tradition, or when their form echoes some traditional form, obviously pre-English, and when the influences at work upon the writer can be seen to be wholly internal to the culture from which he 'springs'. Books which mix traditions, or which seek consciously to break with tradition, are often treated as highly suspect. (Rushdie 2010: 67)

The suspicions referred in Rushdie's claims are on how hybridity and socio-cultural transformations affecting national stereotypes are reflected in the narrative. Though these may have been received with some suspicion, over 30 years on from when this essay was written in 1983, much has changed in the socio-political, cultural, economic and literary scene. Mixed traditions have come to be generally accepted; as hybrid communities and multicultural societies emerge and gain power in the redesigning of the social order and political ideologies. But there are still exceptions to the general rule since Western societies, though more open to changing socio-cultural factors and adapting political strategies for the integration and assimilation of cultural forms beyond national borders, still control what is accepted and allowed as part of a society, or what is commercially viable. And in the same way, political and economic systems control cultural production commanding the direction of what is allowed through mainstreaming marketing.

The model which has come to be accepted for postcolonial narratives is one which questions *nationness* and raises debates on the issue of cultural belonging. Everything about the novel, the narrative form, linguistic style and fictional content symbolize this search for identity by challenging former more dominant models. The risk involved in the establishment of these strategies and in the acceptance of these models is that they too gain power to become

defining structures for a national culture rather than narratives of resistance or counter discourses. Indian Writing in English runs this risk:

> Models which stress the shared language and shared circumstances of colonialism (recognizing vast differences in the expression of British imperialism from place to place) allow for counter-discursive strategies, but unless their stress is on counter-discursive fields of activity, such models run the risk of becoming colonisers in their turn. African critics and writers in particular have rejected these models for their apparently neo-assimilative bases, and opted instead for the national and Pan-African. But if the impulse behind much post-colonial literature is seen to be broadly counter-discursive, and it is recognized that the resulting strategies may take many forms in different cultures, I think we have a more satisfactory model than national, racial, or cultural groupings based on marginalization can offer, and one which perhaps avoids some of the pitfalls of earlier collective models or paradigms. (Tiffin 2006: 100)

This discussion serves to emphasize that the making of postcolonial cultural forms is a process, rather than a static reality, to apply Hellen Tiffin's words. Since the time of decolonization the world has been witnessing many changes, many cultural and social processes which are in constant movement. These processes also involve a constant dialogue between old and new forms which continue to raise questions on the relationship between colonizers and the colonized and which are attempts at reversing the relation of power between the Western imperialism and the former 'Third' world. "Processes of artistic and literary decolonisation have involved a radical dis/mantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses." (Tiffin 2006: 99). Ideally, the model for post-colonial narratives should recognize the many socio-cultural, political and linguistic forms involved in the process. It should also not take one form as a defining structure in the representation of a socio-cultural process which is in constant movement.

Therefore, it is necessary to interpret through a historical and sociological perspective and contextualize the literature we are here dealing with. It is also important to understand that Indian Writing in English must not stand in representation for Indian literature as a whole with its many languages, forms, regional differences and reader audience, but can only stand for a part of the Indian population, and who in greater part are no longer even Indian citizens. Furthermore, it is also representative of how the paradigm has shifted from the

conceptualization of nation, history and culture as grand collective defining terms to a focus on the individual, and personal experiences as fundamental in the construction of the collective ideal.

Contemporary Indian literature in English through the individual narrative of experience is fundamental as a passage into Indian history, culture and ethnicities, as also for an understanding of changing and evolving sociological trends in societies, culture, language and literature. It also links Anglophone and South-East Asian nations in a shared history from which both have suffered and gained, opening up the possibility for a deeper and fuller understanding of both cultures through historical processes and its sociological outcomes. Knowledge of the languages and cultures that defined each nation allow for easier translation into other international languages and as a consequence result in the reading of Indian literature from all social and ethnic perspectives by an international audience. In this sense, and along Hellen Tiffin's claims, these writers and cultural producers become ambassadors, tour guides or even colonizers for India, or rather, South East Asia creating their own ideal of the nation and nations in accordance with the model proposed by an international audience and literary standards.

For a fuller reading and understanding of Indian literature, culture and identity, the model proposed by Makarand Paranjape would be the most democratic. His proposal is one where literatures inhabiting different spaces of linguistic, cultural and social representation are placed alongside each other and read comparatively. So diasporic literature would be contrasted and read alongside literature written in India or nationally produced literature, while Indian literature written in English would be read comparatively to vernacular literature. In this way not one form is used in the theoretical understanding of the genre as a whole and so contributing to the emergence of an ideologically constructed view of the so-called Third World cultures and people whether on national territory or in the diaspora. This would be a new form of Orientalism whose original formula, which in a globalized 21st century world, where social studies and technology have helped scholars and scientists to capture, understand and diffuse the reality and diversity of the world experienced simultaneously, needs to be challenged. Furthermore, we are no longer dealing with straightforward categories of

"English", "English literature", "postcolonial literature" but with more complex categories of "international languages and literatures", "globalization" and "postmodernism".

Postcolonialism emerges as a consequence of colonialism. Social, racial and political stereotypes of identity stemming from colonial ideologies remain and result in the creation of stigmas in former dominating and subordinated peoples. These social and political roles are naturally assimilated and taken for granted in the reinterpretation of cultural identities, even if unconsciously so. This means that postcolonial literature is in itself an ideologically conflicting form as it involves complicated cultural and political biases, tensions and resistances which originate from colonial and neo-colonial ideological positions. Today, the need has developed for a pluralistic and globally constructed understanding of people, cultures and nation, just as of literature as a fictional representation of these shifting theoretical concepts. Through a different conceptualization of how nations are restructured and national identities constructed, a new vision of India and the Indian people and society based on equal social values and perspectives is possible. Fiction has accommodated itself within the space that makes this conceptualization possible.

Diasporic literature and Indian writing in English alone cannot be used to represent a national and cultural reality. Nor can these literary branches be used uniquely in the representation and understanding of multifaceted social realities. But they are, however, an important and fundamental part of the process, as personal narratives, expressions of individual experience and subjective interpretations of history and social realities. In India, a largely poor country, literature is still widely a business of and for the elite, though literature and film have been opening the way for the depiction of new social realities. And in the diaspora, as in the homeland, artistic and cultural representation can assume many forms besides the literary or intellectual. Creative representations of the self as a socio-cultural entity can be expressed through food, the mass production and commercialization of cultural artefacts, fashion, music and music videos, or even social practice and interaction as a cultural form in itself.

Vernacular literatures too have been attributed an ungrateful position in the postcolonial context and in particular, in the interpretation of so-called "Third World" culture and literature in Western societies. In a multicultural, globalized world national languages

and literatures are not necessarily rooted in the vernacular. Literature has undergone a process of "internationalization" whereby languages, historical processes, cultural identities and literary movements and forms are redefining as well as refining themselves and carving out personal spaces, stages and gathering audiences in a globalized world. Translating vernacular literature, and commercializing it internationally is important also as a counter narrative of nation, exposing other issues of authenticity and socio-cultural complexities taking place in the homeland through the nationally located individual.

Reinterpreting national identity

Though the transnational reading of literature and the translation of texts has existed for centuries[43] the uprooting of literary forms is nevertheless a recent phenomenon which emerged with decolonization and the new wave of migration it brought about. Although vernacular texts were considered ancient documents of important social and cultural value, they were hardly read outside their national borders prior to imperial expansion. And during colonial presence ancient texts like the *Vedas* were read and translated by scholars learned in vernacular languages. These ancient and spiritual texts were representations of a timeless past, and described the ancient structures which defined the nation's cultural heritage. These texts and what they stood/stand for today may be considered as genuine or "authentic" representations of the Indian culture and history. According to Elleke Boehmer, colonial officials relied on ancient texts for guidance on how to colonize occupied territories by helping in the understanding of local laws and the social distribution of the land and its people. Ancient texts were the laws by which a nation and its people were organized, and may be considered authentic in their structuring essence, but the space that emerged in the postcolonial context allowed for an expression of individual feelings and experiences which had never before been exposed. This is also an experience of the authentic.

[43] We can go as far back as the translation of Biblical texts.

Later, in the early 20th century, nationalist movements began to emerge in India, as in other colonized nations in Africa and the Caribbean. Writers and artists expressed their desire for a unified nation and a new way of expressing cultural identity. But many Indian writers of the colonial era expressed their sense of national unity and identity by writing in English and using English literary forms. It was through a hybridization of the English medium that a new Indian identity was defined through a narrative voice.

> So it was that culture – in the form of reinterpreted history, religious revivals, elegiac and nostalgic poetry and music – developed into an important front for nationalist mobilization. To this end literary conventions and discourses inherited from the colonizer were appropriated, translated, decentered, and hybridized in ways which we now name postcolonial but which were in fact at the time anti-colonial, often opportunistic, tactical, and ad-hoc, and which formed an important means of self-expression. Though very gradually at first, given imperial constraints, colonized writers began to come into their own. Starting before the Great War but especially during decades following, writers like Tagore (India), and Solomon Plaatje (South Africa) took up the Western Genres of the novel, sonnet, and short story to articulate their own perceptions of cultural space and experience. (Boehmer 2005: 96)

So as colonized writers increasingly assimilated Western forms and discourses for their own artistic expression, the distinction and division between centre and periphery lost some of its significance as the lines that separated one from the other became unclear. Furthermore, as Boehmer, has pointed out, so-called native writers, colonized writers or Third World writers became important protagonists of literary and artistic movements and in the defining of essential philosophical, social, political or economic factors that affected these movements. This is true for both modernist, and colonial as for postmodernist and postcolonial literature. So the emergence of colonial nationalist Indian literature, as later postcolonial Indian literature, in both cases written in English, became an important element of self-expression, resistance and national unity for the Indian people at home and abroad.

> With this in mind, we might want to think of anti-imperial cultural nationalism as performing as it were, a double process of cleaving. That is, cleaving in both senses of the word: *cleaving from*: moving away from colonial definitions, transgressing the boundaries of colonialist discourse; and in order to effect this, *cleaving to*: borrowing, taking over, or appropriating the ideological, linguistic, and textual form of the colonial power.

While British writers who addressed colonial experience dwelt on themes of retreat and disillusionment, nationalist colonial writers were responding, often in English, in English metre and English idiom, with expression of cultural pride. (Boehmer 2005:101)

These literary facts and realities were occurring parallel to important political global events such as the emergence of anti-colonial movements in European nations as in colonized nations and the Great Wars. But they were also appearing as a direct influence of Indian nationalist and anti-British movements and uprisings which began to appear in the mid and late 19th Century and which paved the way to Gandhi who returned to India from South Africa in 1915. Mahatma Gandhi, who according to the *The Oxford History of India* succeeded in uniting India as one with a common objective and through peaceful means "who set his face against violence, though many of his actions seemed to incite it" (786). It is wrong, in a sense, and once again seemingly Orientalist to define social, political or literary movements in colonized nations according to European historical processes and dates. It is important to understand that non-European nations, though colonized, developed according to historical and social processes of their own, even when assimilating European forms and incorporating them as part of their own self-identification. By the 1920s in India, political and national consciousness was gaining a strong ground and was able to confront the British on equal terms. The following paragraph from the *The Oxford History of India* summarizes Gandhi's leadership and its effect on the maturing of Indian political consciousness:

Thus the movements ended in apparent failure. But things were never the same again. These events formed a psychological watershed in the development of modern India. The 'colonial' mentality had been thrown off; nationalists felt themselves to be members of an adult nation, able to treat with the government on equal terms. (Smith 2008:786)

Indian nationalist movements also incorporated native cultural as well as regional or social characteristics. An example of this was Bengali nationalism in the 1880s. Naturally, most of this form of literary expression was done by a geographically and ethnically defined, minority male, literate elite, but whose socio-political driving force behind the writing was

intended to embrace the nation as a whole within a nationalist perspective, to define a cultural identity and speak out against imperial, colonial powers.

> Across geographically separate regions, writers were interested in exploring historical beginnings and aetiologies as the basis for a new selfhood, in order to bludgeon the damage of the colonial past. That which was perceived as source they named authentic. Bent to the construction of a 'real' or rooted identity, both settler and native writers found themselves in situations of conflicted collaboration with European cultural forms – the nation, identity, 'civilization'. (Boehmer 2005: 110)

So whether written in native languages, creole or English, colonial or anti-colonial writing in India became an important form of expression Indian culture and in the redefining of Indian historical roots and origins by reversing the model of power and dichotomies of domination even before independence. Indian (as other colonized nations) literary and artistic forms were also important influences on the work of many European and American modernist writers and artists who defined this artistic movement. So in effect, the formulations of artistic movements are achieved and defined through a symbiosis of cultural, ethnic and spiritual factors working from both Eastern and Western origins and processes.

Though in a sense leaving behind or unspoken a vast majority of unrepresented people, needless to say, however, colonialist writings are essential documents for Western readers interested in a deeper search for Indian cultural roots and for the establishment of a national identity. Even while relying on Indian writing in English, a true scholar of Indian literature and artistic expression would undoubtedly have to be widely read and knowledgeable in many of the literatures and languages of such a vastly linguistic and cultural nation in order to obtain a fuller understanding of the complexity of its history. Not being able to do so in this thesis, I have been proposing a different approach to the dialectic; one of understanding identity through the postcolonial narrative as a pathway into a fictional reconstruction of the nation's history and culture.

It is through the colonial and postcolonial novel in English and translations of other widely read writers such as Tagore that a nation such as India has become known to the world. And it is through contemporary writers such as Rushdie, Desai and Roy who have become ambassadors, or "tour guides" of India for the rest of the world, as they have been termed by

Lisa Lau and Ana Mendes in *Re-Orientalism* (2010), that narrative representations of India have moved closer to European standards. These writers are re-Orientalising the Orient, for a Western audience and in doing so redefining their roles within a European tradition of humanism. Whether this is a positive or negative aspect of postcolonial literatures is also debatable. By digging up the past through a nostalgic and imaginary revisiting of the homeland, while simultaneously exposing the fragile and fragmented nature of nation and culture in today's reading of the world, postcolonial and postmodern Indian writers are both constructing an Indian identity as well as shaping the present and future vision of India.

Scholars and other readers of Indian literature will delve further through the many branches, roots and forms of Indian literature whether past or contemporary to learn more about the ancient culture and its historical processes as well as to understand the meaning of current social trends and movements. And though the unfolding of the past and the understanding of historical processes is fundamental in the construction of cultural identity, the gathering of the little details which shape individual experience are also essential parts that compose the whole. The construction of a thorough Indian literary history will contribute towards a broader, more encompassing and fuller knowledge and understanding of India. Moreover, the evolution of worldwide translation has made it possible for texts of any language to be read by readers all round the world further broadening knowledge of this ancient and varied culture. As a result, more and more writers stemming from different social backgrounds, ancient worlds and previously unread languages by a wider international audience are being discovered and creating further grounds for this postcolonial debate. The colonial and postcolonial debate therefore shifts further and further away from the Eurocentric perspective opening up new perspectives, raising and challenging new cultural biases and giving way to new interpretations of radical native ideological forms.

Taking the discussion a step further, whereas vernacular literature, such as sacred texts, was in a traditional sense, mostly the literature of the elite, of the sacred, and not accessible to society as a whole, literature today is of free access to all those who wish to read or write (and this applies to all nations of the world and not just India)[44]. And as we find

[44] Here I could discuss the historical role of the oral tradition in many ancient societies and the evolution of literacy and how the two are interrelated. Whereas ancient texts were only available to a minority elite in societies, such as nobles, the clergy or the scholars and writers or poets in Europe, and again royalty or Brahmins

ourselves in the 21st century and the present state of the world, no longer only characterized by political and cultural domination, but also by linguistic and technological imperialism, literature and literacy become even more widely available to everyone as a whole through even newer forms and mediums.

Fictional narratives gained importance as their value in the definition and manifestation of a national identity developed alongside the desire for a definition of the nation state. Seeing as the idea of the nation had no solid roots in a past prior to British imperial domination, the use of the imaginary and the fictional were powerful tools in the unity of the self and community, independent of religion, language, ethnicity, class or caste. What had mattered at the time of independence was a sense of national and cultural belonging and identification. What became important later was the cultural manifestation of nation and how it was expressed. Literature, therefore became a fundamental form in this process and continues to play a valuable role in the creation and re-creation of Indian identity.

> Although the nation in certain situations took on wider definitions of race, or of a community identified by its racial oppression, in general the independent nation-state at this time was seen to represent the most achieved form of self-realization for oppressed peoples. Following the incisive analysis of Benedict Anderson, in postcolonial criticism the process of national self-making in story and symbol is often called *imagining the nation.* What this phrase implies is that the nation as we know it is a thing of social artifice – a symbolic formation rather than a natural essence. It exists in so far as the people who make up the nation have it in mind, or experience it as citizens, soldiers, readers of newspapers, watchers of television, students, and so on. Every new instance of independence, therefore – and some might say each new stage in the process of winning independence – required that the nation be reconstructed in the collective imagination; or that identity be symbolized anew. As we shall see, fictional narrative, with its potential to compose alternative realities and inscribe new origins and historical trajectories, provided a rich medium for the purpose. (Boehmer 2005: 176-7)

The search that Indian writers in the postcolonial fictional context came to be involved in was the reconstitution of a lost or missing past, the need to strengthen the roots and the ties

in India; and the rest of society relied on the oral tradition for the sharing and passing down of stories. In the past there was also the tradition of reading out loud to a group, which has also been replaced by silent reading as literacy spread throughout society as a whole.

that connected them to the motherland, the desire for a culture which Indians abroad and at home could identify with as part of a multi-layered national structure, and all these aspects through the experience of changing and emerging social realties.

In *The God of Small Things* the changes the Ayemenem house goes through, and how characters adapt, adjust and make sense of the past and present is an important metaphor of cultural processes and realities,

> Baby Kochamma had installed a dish antenna on the roof of the Ayemenem house. She presided over the World in her drawing room on satellite TV. The impossible excitement that this engendered in Baby Kochamma wasn't hard to understand. It was something that happened gradually. It happened overnight. Blondes, wars, famines, football, sex, music, coups d'etat – they all arrived on the same train. They unpacked together. They stayed in the same hotel. And in Ayemenem, where once the loudest sound had been a musical bus horn, now whole wars, famines, picturesque massacres and Bill Clinton could be summoned up like servants. And so, while her ornamental garden wilted and died, Baby Kochamma followed NBA league games, one-day cricket and all the Grand Slam tennis tournaments. (Roy 1997:27)

The passage above is a metaphor for how globalization affected cultural transformations in Indian daily practices and identity. It is also a representation of how fiction can be used to portray cultural transformation. Postcolonial Indian writing, besides the fictional reconstruction of culture and history in its thematic and narrative content, also exposes the local appropriation and adaptation of literary styles and the creative use of language as an element of postcolonial discourse. Another passage from *The God of Small Things* depicts how English language politics had made its way into society:

> That whole week baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twin's private conversations, and whenever he caught them speaking in Malayalam, she levied a small fine which was deducted at source. From their pocket money. She made them write lines – 'impositions' she called them – *I will always speak in English, I will always speak in English*. A hundred times each. When they were done, she scored them out with her red pen to make sure that old lines were not recycled for new punishments.
>
> She made them practice an English car song for the way back. They had to form the words properly, and be particularly careful with pronunciation. Prer *NUN* sea ayshun.

Rej-Oice in the Lo-Ord Or-Orlways

And again I say rej-Oice,

RejOice,

RejOice,

And again I say rej-Oice (Roy 1997:36)

Postcolonial Indian writers, just as postcolonial writers from African and Caribbean countries, searched for a way to somehow be both different and alike their colonial counterparts. By expressing their cultural identity through a linguistic and narrative medium familiar to former colonizers, but branding it as a local or native variety through an ethnic and creative appropriation of narrative and linguistic forms, a new kind of writing emerged. The intention here, as can be seen from the passage above from *The God Small Things* was also to challenge former structures which defined language and form, through an experimentation and a playing with language and style, and consequently meaning.

> To conceive an independent national identity, postcolonial writers concentrated on developing a symbolic vocabulary that was recognizably indigenous – or at least other to European representation and yet at the same time intelligible within a global grammar of post-war politics. In particular, they enjoined one another to tap into the borrowed influences of Europe. (Boehmer 2005:178) [45]

This conflict with empire and the desire to construct an idea of the nation while simultaneously restoring a national identity resulted in a reinterpretation of nation through the expression of linguistic, social and cultural transformations. This reinterpretation was achieved through the revival of myths, spirituality, traditions and tales, through the re-birth of the oral tradition now incorporated into the written text as well as the assimilating of European, mainly British forms. The narratives written in the decades following the independence of India, African nations and the Caribbean became a form of resistance and

[45] Boehmer also discusses postcolonial writing from the colonizer's perspective. She argues that both colonizer and colonized writers shared important characteristics such as the search for a homeland, sense of belonging to both cultural and geographical landscapes. But whereas colonizers sought to belong in the new, previously occupied lands, they now considered theirs as well, so continuity in the present, colonized peoples sought the re-identification with a land that had been taken away from them and a connection with a broken past.

expression of cultural unity for former colonized peoples. Through literature and other art forms native people gained a voice and were able to speak out for their own experience of colonialism, decolonization and what they were living in the postcolonial years. These years were marked by great social and political movements and transformations both in former colonies, as in Western societies. People reacted in many different ways against any form of oppression and political totalitarianism. This was a time when culture, in its broader sense, gained a more democratic and socially egalitarian perspective.

The pressures of decolonization and the restructuring of a nation shadowed by the effects of empire were represented and depicted in many postcolonial novels, including those being analysed for the purpose of this thesis, through the experience of its protagonists. In the case of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai's birth and destiny were inevitably connected to the birth of a nation. In *The God of Small Things* Estha and Rahels traumatic experience is further heightened by the transformations they observe in their once familiar hometown of Kerala. There is also a sense of abandonment or of being left orphaned by both mother and motherland which also provokes the feeling of displacement and detachment in the twins. In *The Inheritance of Loss* both Sai and her grandfather, the Judge, also live difficult moments of transition and adaptation between worlds and cultural behaviours.

These novels also take the postcolonial dialectic a little further. In the case of Rushdie and Desai, who are, in a way, diasporic writers, I interpret their narratives as a reconciliation with a lost past and ancestral culture. The characters and the spaces they represent are, on the part of the writers, a reencounter or a retrieval of an inherited culture and past, which might be lacking in their existences as Indians abroad and in the construction of their Indian identity. For Roy, who is not considered a diasporic writer, as she is an Indian citizen and resident, her novel is one of protest against the negative effects of imperialism and the seeds of capitalism it left behind which grew to occupy the legitimate site of tradition and traditional spaces. She chooses the voice, thoughts, feelings and memories of children to denounce her anti-imperial beliefs.

The emergence of a new postcolonial discourse is also illustrated through the representation of silence and invisibility. Estha's silence is also a metaphor for the many

voices silenced, oppressed by history and historical circumstances, and denied a narrative, or even a space.

> Estha had always been a quiet child, so no one could pinpoint with any degree of accuracy exactly when (the year, if not the month or day) he had stopped talking. Stopped talking altogether, that is. The fact is that there wasn't an 'exactly when'. It had been a gradual winding down and closing shop. A barely noticeable quietening. As though he had simply run out of conversation and had nothing left to say. Yet Estha's silence was never awkward. Never intrusive. Never noisy. It wasn't an accusing, protesting silence as much as a sort of aestivation, a dormancy, the psychological equivalent of what lungfish do to get themselves through the dry season, except that in Estha's case the dry season looked as though it would last forever.
>
> Over time he had acquired the ability to blend into the background of wherever he was – into bookshelves, gardens, curtains, doorways, streets – to appear inanimate, almost invisible to the untrained eye. It usually took strangers a while to notice him even when they were in the same room with him. It took them even longer to notice that he never spoke. Some never noticed at all.
>
> Estha occupied very little space in the world. (Roy 1997: 10)

Estha's silence mirrors the experience of the subaltern. He had stopped in time and fallen into silence. It is with Rahel's return that he is awakened, gaining consciousness, though still struggling to find meaning in the tangled mass of symbols that he has to re-order so as to understand himself, and his experience.

> It had been quiet in Estha's head until Rahel came. But with her she had brought the sound of passing trains, and the light and shade that falls on you if you have a window seat. The world, locked out for years, suddenly flooded in, and now Estha couldn't hear himself for the noise. Trains. Traffic. Music. The Stock Market. A dam had burst and savage waters swept everything up in a swirling. Comets, violins, parades, loneliness, clouds, beards, bigots, lists, flags, earthquakes, despair were all swept up in a scrambled swirling. (Roy 1997: 14-15)

Understanding the postcolonial in the decades following independence meant the creation of a narrative discourse that both embraced and challenged the colonial world. By the turn of the 21st century the motivation behind the postcolonial gains a new thematic and narrative impulse. And as the century progresses, so too forms and meanings evolve and cultures are subjected to constant reassessment. Mixed cultural signs increasingly become a

representation of the authentic, reflecting the hybrid forms in the experience of a multicultural, globalized society. Linguistic and narrative strategies in the novels by now reveal a postmodern as well as the postcolonial preoccupation with the state of the world and its cultures.

The postmodern effect

The postmodern condition instils doubt. It raises questions on the value of objectivity and representability. The main challenge of postmodernism is to debate not only if we can ever know the past, but whether the past or the present can in fact be represented and if so, what is the point in this representation. This leads to an oversimplified view of postmodernism in general, whether in art, architecture, literature or film as being detached from historical and cultural perspective, though this is not necessarily the case. Although postmodernism challenges traditional historical or cultural patterns and conventions, the postmodern text is always attached to history. As Linda Hutcheon argues, the postmodern always involves a return to the past, but it is not a nostalgic return, as the postcolonial may be, but a "critical reworking" (Hutcheon 1991: 4).

Postmodernism in literature is a reflection of contemporary society. It questions the value and form of representation itself. Postmodern narratives show how societies, cultures, languages and other social values are shifting, becoming less clearly defined in all senses, including the dichotomy of Eastern and Western division and classifications. Postcolonial writing in the late 20th and now 21st centuries has moved beyond the narratives of colonial resentment and revenge, beyond resistance to colonial domination and beyond a longing for a nostalgic idea of nation. It has begun to accommodate itself within the transnational discourse. The postcolonial subject which seems now to be in focus, is one confronted with a changing and evolving cultural scene, as I will go on to analyse more closely.

In the postcolonial diasporic narrative today, as a result of the transnational experience of those who are responsible for its production, there is also an interesting reversal of power roles. Whereas once colonial or settler Europeans were depicting their arrival in new lands

and their encounter with natives in their writing, nowadays non-European, such as South East Asian, African and Caribbean writers are doing the same but from a reverse perspective. In their narratives they depict their experience as new citizens of Western societies and their interaction with Western natives and locals. The renegotiation of roles and the assimilation of new cultural forms within Western societies imply a certain understanding between nations and an adhesion to commercial and economic forces. The postcolonial text is somehow manipulated into propagating the representation of the colonial, diasporic or immigrant subject Western critics and publisher as well as reader demand. In return they are widely published and prized. There is a somewhat disturbing or perverse relationship between former colonizer and colonized people which overshadows the traditional expectations of postcolonial ideological thought and motivations. It seems like the postcolonial novel should in effect be an expression of freedom and liberal ideas from a very random and diverse group of people who have been subject to oppression, violence and silenced by history. It should represent political as well as human rights and the socio-cultural beliefs of those who have been denied that possibility because of authoritarian ideological systems. Rather, it seems that much of the mainstream postcolonial writing is in compliance with the neo-colonial and still very much empowered imperial systems on which the world and its political and economic systems are structured.

In the years following independence and through to the current moment, the shifting of social, cultural, ideological and linguistic values have been increasingly expressed and reassessed through fiction. Self-recognition and identity gained form and means of expression through the appropriation of a new literary form. Indian writing in English had been slowly developing and revealing itself as a narrative form starting during the British presence in India. But with independence, diaspora and the influence of globalization and transformations at many social, economic and political levels both in India and in host countries, postcolonial literature in India and in the diaspora suffered a creative and revelatory explosion. The postmodern, postcolonial narrative "offered a rich resource for cultures seeking redefinitions of locale, community, and identity." (Boehmer 2005:193) Regardless of criticism surrounding authenticity, language choice and representation of minority social or ethnic groups, this was

an important step in the history and construction of Indian identity and literary theory at home and abroad.

> Crossing the adventures of indigenous gods with European realism, superimposing images from other worlds on Westernized city landscapes, post-independence writers relied on an intensely practical hybridity, usually attributed to the challenging work of Homi Bhabha, could be seen to refer to a bewildering array of different kinds of mixing. In relation to much post-independence writing, however, the fact is that novelists, playwrights, and poets probably had little option but to be syncretic. No matter how determined were the writer's efforts at reclamation, in a postcolonial society, coming to terms with the corrosion of tradition during colonial occupation, cultural purity was not on offer. (Boehmer 2005: 194)

Postcolonial writers, therefore, willingly entered a hybrid, multicultural world where cultural and literary forms and norms, traditions and languages are fused. And from within this cultural puzzle, an emphasis is placed on accommodating a microcosm of stories and characters that rise from the bottom, from nothing and gain importance and meaning in the construction of a nation and culture. This digging up of silenced voices, and focus on the marginalized opposes the obsolete, stereotypical construction of identity and experience from a general, Eurocentric, top-down perspective. As portrayed in both *The God of Small Things* as in *The Inheritance of Loss*, (and further discussed in the 3rd Chapter) the lives, experiences and perspectives of the people forgotten or ignored by history such as the cook, the displaced immigrant, the servant, the villagers, the children, the street sellers or other such characters who like Estha, "occupied very little space in the world" (Roy 1997: 11), are also important pieces of the puzzle that compose a (hi)story. Or who like Rahel were also invisible, "She was just a landscape. A flower perhaps. Or a tree. A face in the crowd. A townspeople. Nobody said Hello to Rahel. Not even the Blue Army in the greenheat." (Roy 1997: 173). Or who like Velutha, "left no footprints in the sand, no ripples in the water, no image in mirrors." (Roy 1997:265). Through literature new perspectives on social strands and personal histories are given life and remembered. Regardless of what has been formerly believed, these factors, no matter how tiny when compared with the traditional retelling of the history of a nation, are fundamental historic details. "Little events, ordinary things, smashed reconstituted. Imbued with meaning. Suddenly become the bleached bones of a story." (Roy 1997:32-33).

The recent development of postcolonial literature leading to the state of the art today is no longer focused on the appropriation of humanitarian values and the overt fictional rewriting of historical and cultural processes we witnessed during decolonization and following independence. It is, I would claim, both a celebration and a cry of anger an ongoing reflection on how "deep" "the sea" is and on how "dark" "the earth" can be, an awakening to the realization that we live in a "world go[ne] wild" to quote Allen Ginsberg in "An Eastern Ballad"[46].

The postmodern effect on the novel has deconstructed formerly established standards of writing and thought where language, style, characters, time and spaces had previously occupied specific and well defined roles. Up until the mid 19th century (though there are records of an Indian English novel from the late 18th century) the English language, the novel as literary form and themes such as writing about the colonies or travel writing were well defined as standard forms. There was no transgression of their fairly well accepted limits of recognizable forms and boundaries in a so-believed properly functioning world. Postmodern literature, and in this specific case, Indian Writing in English, mixes, crosses over, transgresses and tampers with boundaries, forms and style as there is no other way to more authentically and honestly portray the world and culture we have all inherited. A world, and existence, which is impossible to define coherently. Quoting Rahel,

> Perhaps, Ammu, Estha and she were the worst transgressors. But it wasn't just them. It was the others too. They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. The laws that made grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins, cousins, jam jam, and jelly jelly. (Roy 1997:31)

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[46] I speak of love that comes to mind:
The moon is faithful, although blind;
She moves in thought she cannot speak.
Perfect care has made her bleak.

I never dreamed the sea so deep,
The earth so dark; so long my sleep,
I have become another child.
I wake to see the world go wild.

Ginsberg, Allen (1995) *Collected Poems 1947-1985*. London: Penguin.

The postmodern narrative, as in much artistic expression which has been termed according to this category, seeks to challenge the whole notion of limits and boundaries. It represents an inability and resistance to containing the political, the personal, the public, or the socially acceptable within its limits of respectability, familiarity and acceptance. For this reason, postmodern art becomes at once simultaneously naked and truthful, as well as over-exaggerated and superficial. It is a complex and self-conflicting theory of art as a reflection of contemporary society.

Both the colonial and postcolonial novels may be understood as reflections of the great power former colonial powers had on colonized peoples, their culture and language. They are also both interpretations of colonial influence on local or native cultures. The postcolonial novel as a postmodern artistic form, however, has moved a step forward and attempted to keep in line with, while at the same time challenge universal forces which operate in the world today. Just like in the days of empire there was a desire to homogenize societies and people, in the same way, the current is moving towards a homogenization of postcolonial thought, form and people as a global category. The migrant, displaced, subjugated, rejected and inadaptable subject is a common scapegoat in postcolonial literature. And though these emotional factors are natural consequences of transnational and transculturation in postcolonialism, they must be channelled as creative expressions that question contemporary societies, political ideologies and social policies, rather than simply accepting them as overpowering and surrendering the postcolonial form to a slow, painful death. Does postcolonialism lose itself in the theoretical abstraction of the concept or can it continue to make itself visible as an active form in contemporary global society and in a complex world where imperialism is still deep-rooted is a question I am concerned with.

One of the main thrusts of postmodern thought in postcolonial writing is the notion that we are no longer dealing with “otherness” but rather with difference and variety as creative processes. What was once considered one dimensional has now entered a multidimensional sphere. Difference is not to be considered as oppositional – black versus white, West versus East – immigrant versus host – but as a kaleidoscope of multiple simultaneously co-existing forms together in a single reality. I call it a single reality because all the pieces which can be separated in order to understand distinct stories come together in

the formation of the contemporary society. This reflects a growth, or a development in the writing of former colonized people.

> From the early 1970s the Nobel Prize – winning St Lucian poet Derek Walcott defined a historically mature writing of the Caribbean as one which had moved beyond colonial-period utterances of recrimination and revenge. In similar vein, the Kenyan journalist Parselelo Kantai more recently urged critics to remember that for African literature now 'the narrative of decolonization has collapsed'. In the writer Helon Habila's opinion, too, as African novelists in the 2000s turn increasingly towards local audiences and narrative traditions, and away from the implied European reader, they become ever more independent interpreters of their own internal conflicts and identities. They release themselves from the long-standing fixation on the colonial fixation with Europe. (Boehmer 2005:251)

Language politics and the postcolonial novel

The postcolonial novel, and referring to India, especially since the 1980's, with Rushdie, and later Roy, and Desai mixes cultural, literary and linguistic elements in the narrative in a palimpsest of ideas, memories and influences that together and layered compose these writers' hybrid identities. The choice of the English language medium and its creative adaptation is an obvious example of how postcolonial writers are discovering and redesigning their identities. And this is not only true for India as for many other literatures emerging round the globe. Just as an example, Junot Diaz's *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) is a novel written in both English and Spanish, but which uses Dominican dialects, slang and switches between one language form and another. African American writers use local dialects and colloquialisms to express their ideas in the narratives which are frequently written from the perspective of the first person as narrator who many times is a teenager, child, woman or even slave.[47] There are also contemporary British, American, Canadian or Australian literature written by writers, first, second or third generation of any other nation. And there

[47] Examples are: Richard Wright *Native Son* (1940), Mildred D. Taylor *Roll of Thunder Hear my Cry* (1976), Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and Toni Morrison's novels, among many others.

are yet, writers of mixed nationality who write in a third language which is of neither one of their parents.[48]

The appropriation of the colonizer's tongue used in postcolonial literature has raised much discussion on nationalism, on cultural values and identity, and has also induced the notion of subjugation to a still dominant power. Questions which emerge concerning the choice of English as a linguistic medium in postcolonial literature are for example, how is it possible to express a national feeling and to reconstruct a national identity by affirming these through a foreign tongue, especially one which was used in the past as an ideological tool in imperial domination? Indian, just as other literatures of former colonized nations has come to be globally recognized as the medium through which an oppressed people and nation may find liberation. Speaking in a language that was not originally its own Indian identity is expressed in narrative form and the English language is appropriated as a native form.

All these questions and claims add further intricacies to the postcolonial debate. Language is a powerful political and ideological tool. It is also a form chosen and used with a specific intention of reaching a specific audience. Who, in effect, are these writers writing for and why? The dialectic is contradictory, ambiguous and conflicting. The post-colonial ideal of re-writing socio-historical processes; a fictional representation of events through the creative appropriation of the colonizer's tongue reveals an enduring colonial dependence and relation. But the creative authority over language, form and content as a liberating structure on the part of formerly colonized people is also an affirmation of power. It is simultaneously an acceptance of Western forms as governing over the global economic and political structures and in doing so, directing cultural patterns, and a conscious choice to comply with these established structures by creatively working with the standards, limits and patterns in an attempt at personal resistance.

In the postcolonial scene every choice has political motivations, even more than aesthetic. And although artistic production is effective in defining cultural forms, it is nevertheless also moved by economic interests. Vernacular literature is as equally powerful, if not more, especially in the case of writers who deliberately opt not to write in English. The

[48] Joseph Conrad wrote in English while not being his native language. Likewise Kafka who was Czech wrote in German and Jhumpa Lahiri who recently moved to Italy is now writing in Italian, as I referred earlier.

question here is one of stage and again, who are these authors writing for when choosing to do so in a vernacular language and is there space and place for translation?

Kenyan author, Ngugi wa Thiong wrote in English for some time, but in 1979, he began to write in his native tongue, Gikuyu. This is a political choice and also a protest against the economic and ideological structures governing cultural production associated with the use of the English language medium. Having previously written in English and being an internationally read writer already, this shift also increased attention to him as a writer and political activist, and probably increased sales and interest. In a world, as it is today: economically and politically defined, the return to the native voice by an international literary name is, besides a statement of national consciousness, also a marketing strategy taking some of the "purity" away from this choice. The use of English, even in its international forms has become a commercial product for global market imperialism, but so has the rejection of English. Having English as a linguistic medium aids in commercial relations between nations and cultures and in the mutual understanding of cultural meanings. Using English or the native language may not be a choice in most cases, but rather a natural outcome of historical processes, but in other cases, it may be a decision which raises difficult debates for writers who have both options. Whatever the choice of language, the main focus is the narrative and how through it stories are constructed and meanings extracted. In sum,

> Those who use English worry about the limited accessibility to local populations. Knotty questions of political and cultural Orientation crop up. Does literature in English signify a lasting colonial dependency, a cultural correlate for the neo-colonial economic relations which continue to exist between the metropolitan centre and the formerly colonized periphery? Do postcolonial writers find themselves in the position of producing literary 'raw material' – which conveniently needs no translation – for the critical and academic industries of wealthy Northern countries? Can those who write in European languages claim to speak to and for their own people? (Boehmer 2005:199)

These are all difficult and important questions surrounding the issue of using or not using English which carries the stigma of being the language of the former colonizers and of being today the international language of globalization. English carries both the weight of colonialism and a certain superficiality in essence as it is easily adapted to any region, culture

or usage. Chinua Achebe's perspective on this issue was that English was a part of Nigerian life, and therefore felt comfortable in its use by Nigerian writers.

> Though in a very different national context, the critic Aijaz Ahmad in India takes a line similar to that of Achebe. To subtract English from South Asian cultural life, he observes, would be as absurdly pointless as boycotting the railways. English has simply become one of the languages of the subcontinent. Especially following the efflorescence of the Indian novel in English since the 1980s, the language has also been fully accepted as a creative medium. Its elimination in favour of Hindi, once a political objective, is now no longer an issue. (Boehmer 2005:200)

To add to this argument, diaspora, global markets and international artistic trends have further endorsed the use of English, not only in literature, but also in film. So not only using English, as also adapting the language to local cultural specificities has in itself become a fundamental aspect of postcolonial creativity and a revealing exposure of postmodern cultural fragmentation and simulacrums.

> Many postcolonial writers have fallen in with Achebe's opinion concerning English. For them, the choice of the language as an international medium, though with the potential for multifarious local adaptations, is a foregone if never entirely comfortable conclusion. Few turn up their noses at the large readership and more affluent market to which they have access by writing in English. Cultural authenticity or linguistic purity, writers tacitly accept, is in any case not on offer in their mixed heterogeneous world. And the English language itself, shared amongst a varied group of postcolonial nations, is showing interesting signs of its many transcultural migrations."(Boehmer 2005:200)

Postcolonial writing from India is creatively using the English language as a representation of how the language too suffers transformations and can be re-colonized by the once subjugated people. In Chantal Zabus' provocative words:

> When the British settled or colonized various parts of this planet, they did not know that their tongue was going to be (metaphorically) twisted, bloated, shrunk, pulled out, severed, mangled, hacked. If they had known, they might have thought twice about the future use of this fleshy muscular organ and the language it carried – English. (Zabus 2002: 29)

Indian English and the creative use of English found in Indian postcolonial writing such as in Rushdie, Desai and Roy, while assuming a historical and ideological relation with the language and Britain, because of its colonial past, also represents an overturning of the dominant power relations. By deconstructing, distorting, dismembering, playing with the language and reproducing it in a new re-created version when compared to Standard or British English, the postcolonial is also an anti-colonial form for its revolutionary creativity.

> When 'the Empire writes back to the centre', it does so not so much with a vengeance as 'with an accent', by using a language that topples discourse conventions of the so-called 'centre' and inscribing post-colonial language variants from the 'margin' or the 'periphery' in the text. Such variants result from the transformation of language through local use, itself the result of social change. Yet the inscription of variants within a text often goes beyond the mere recording of such a transformation. The writer then no longer imitates what is happening as a result of social change but uses language variance as an alibi to convey ideological variance. (Zabus 2002:34)

The English language and Macaulay's visionary ideals have been stripped of their original form and mushroomed around the world as new creole, local or even fictional dialects. Consciously or not these new linguistic forms of expression, whether written or spoken are important symbols of postcolonial protest, resistance and ideological perspective. Furthermore, the transformation and distortion the so-called English language has suffered since the 19th century have also contributed towards the development of an international English literature as a global phenomenon.

> What began in postcolonial writing as the creolization of the English language has become a process of mass literary transplantation, disaggregation, and cross-fertilization, a process that is changing the nature of what was once called English literature – or more accurately, literature in English – at its very heart. (Boehmer 2005:226)

Contemporary, postcolonial literatures challenge Western historical, political and social hegemony placing fiction in a role of authority. And the definition of a national or

cultural purity and a homogenous identity as form is also challenged through the branching of diversity and social difference even within the national context become visible realities manifested within the multicultural nation and its transnational communities. Preconceived ideals on the presumed non-changing nature of literary, musical and artistic forms of expression to represent a nation and culture are also challenged. Linguistic adaptations, non-linearity, temporal and spatial poetics all appear as new, provocative and non-conventional in the narrative style of Indian contemporary writers (like Rushdie, Roy and Desai) as in other postcolonial and postmodern writing.

A multiplicity of voices in Indian identity

The postcolonial novel today or postmodern fiction as I have been discussing, represents and is representative of a world and people lacking in a fixed and stable sense of meaning and who are breaking free from their roots. What defines identity is no longer a fossilized ideal of the past grounded within a more or less static or stable cultural and national framework, but a free floating, inconstant and changeable reality. Social, technological, transnational, migrant or global factors cause cultural and artistic transformations just as empire, nation, philosophy, theory or religion once did. It is not so much a matter of thinking of society as a cultural entity that governs the individual, but the individual as an entity which governs society.

The postcolonial novel further emphasizes or strengthens this idea by attributing importance to the smaller, more ordinary, not so well known realities, as I have already discussed which also include minorities (ethnic, racial, gender, sexual, political). The decolonized nation or subject finds itself in a position of questioning meaning, identity, cultural and historical roots, national ownership, etc. These feelings of confusion and displacement, as well as the fragmented and fragile structure, or lack of, are intensified in the individual. In a new multi-ethnic, multi-cultural rapidly changing society, identity, roots, history and social classification are all aspects which are shaken, moved, transformed and in need of reassessment and readjustment. This readjustment, however, does not necessarily

mean establishing a model or accepting a certain standard or form. Postcolonial writing is changing just as societies, languages and people are changing, as the very notion of the postcolonial is also needing to readjust to the 21st century. This means creating the space for this narrative voice as an individual expression of a cultural reality.

Whereas in the past, and going back to Hegel and universal truth discussed in Chapter 1, there was the common belief that there was a master form according to which all other forms were governed, this notion today has been continuously challenged at all levels. In postmodernism, there is no master narrative, general truth, or single meaning. This critical thinking contests the idea that meanings are fixed and unchanging. In the postmodern perspective the world can have many meanings and these can be expressed in a range of ways which do not follow any pre-established or institutionalized pattern. In addition to this the old and the past are re-worked, contextualized in contemporary reality and critically reassessed. So the one dimensional grand view of truth and meaning is broken down into a multi-dimensional play between form, content and representation. And the conceptual view of the centre as power, and the centre being the white, Western, rational, heterosexual subject (traditionally male) has been for the most part, overruled.[49] But what is fascinating about postmodernism and trying to define what it is all about are the contradictions we encounter at every corner. Postmodern literature and art in general is both historical and a-historical, it is both profound and superficial, and it is both an attempt at deconstructing the notion of the world as homogenous groups of people and the emphasis on heterogeneous unity within a huge global village. So what brought about this change in society and literature and how is this change expressed and contextualized in theory on the fiction that incorporates this contemporary shift in perception?

Literature of the colonial period defined the colonies, life in the colonies or the people of colonized nations through a European, Western perspective. The purpose of this sort of literature was on the one hand to tell of the colonial experience and to present, as social parody[50] how life was experienced in the exotic part of the world.

[49] Ideally speaking, of course, because there are still many fundamentalist and over conservative mentalities all round the world in both Western and non-Western societies.

[50] Representation of life in the colonies and encounters with natives was not necessarily meant to be comical, though at times, the result was a depiction of inferior, monstrous and inhospitable people, spaces and beliefs.

> Colonial literature often treats of manners, morals, politics, religion, and most other interests of European literature, except that such concerns are explored within the possibilities, contrasts, and cultural hierarchies of local societies and their relationship to Europe. Most colonial and early independence fiction is written within the conventions of realism and social comedy. (King 2002: 5)

Never before had the Orient and Orient al people considered or felt the need to define and describe themselves to the rest of the world. Their knowledge and its diffusion operated on a local rather than universal level. But external presence and influence opened up new possibilities in the definition of the relationship between the local and the universal, old and new, Eastern and Western. So while colonial writers were sending home these messages about the colonized territories and people, and mapping out their experiences in "foreign" or "exotic" lands such as India, South Africa or Nigeria, local individuals were beginning to gain group consciousness, to question their role and position within their land and redesign their own identity through a newly acquired medium and form.

Following the independence of former European colonies, writers, politicians and other intellectuals gained a new concern over how to reconcile the local with the universal, the unique with the global, national cultural awareness and structure with international multicultural existences. Furthermore, a new need emerged, which had previously been muted, suppressed, or rendered irrelevant: the need of the new independent nation to speak out for itself, to develop a voice that would be heard and recognized.[51] In order to do so, form and expression had to be defined for a nation's cultural identity. The desire to gain visibility in the eyes of the world and its readers made writing in English a convenient medium. But to what extent these are conscious and ideological choices, or the unconscious and natural result of historical, social and political processes is hard to determine.

On the one hand, and going back to the discussion on history raised in the first chapter, there is a certain scientific pattern or a common direction in the unfolding of historical processes. Inevitably, contact between civilizations will result in a mixing of cultural forms, values, standards and expectations. This aspect of historical development is beyond the

[51] As already mentioned, these nations, like their literature is only considered "new" in a postcolonial context, for they existed long before the arrival of the Europeans.

control of humankind, though history has proven that there have been oppressive ideologies which have tried and in effect put in practice the control of others who had little power of resistance, such as in the case of colonialism, dictatorships and slavery. On the other hand, humans are conscious beings and most are able to make choices. The choice to write or act in a certain way, the choice of moving to another country and adopting other social habits, or the choice of fusing values and forms is consciously made. Many times, this choice is made out of political, social, religious or ideological beliefs and motivations and may move not one individual, but a large group. But in order to maintain a certain distinctive and cultural stigma, the choice to reconcile, or to create a cultural conflict by mixing forms – Eastern and Western, old and new, English and Hindi (or other Indian languages), traditional and modern, collective and individual - are adopted in the narrative style, plot and language for a literary representation of these changing socio-cultural values. And here, though motivated by cultural, economic and national trends, the individual is agent.

The issue of how to reconcile or fuse the old with the new, the past with the current and the traditional with the modern emerged because of the need to reaffirm traditional values while simultaneously keeping up with a rapidly evolving society. Cultural and national ideals of authenticity and purity are deconstructed and re-adapted to a global standard. Language takes on new meanings and roles, as already discussed, raising questions of whether writers, intellectuals and other professionals should use English or national languages, but also on the creative, cultural and political role of Creole or hybrid languages such as Indian English or Hinglish.[52] All these were fundamental aspects in the definition of a national identity and the establishment of autonomous rule and independence from former imperial powers. According to postcolonial critic Bruce King, this is precisely what gives postcolonial novels and writers their power and meaning in the world today.

Major writers of this period, including Achebe, Soyinka, and Walcott, tend to be concerned with problems of bi-culturalism, the relationship of nationalist cultural assertion to universalism, as well as critically examining what their newly independent nations were doing with their freedom. How could one reconcile cosmopolitan awareness, standards of judgment, and scepticism with the need to see the world through local,

[52] The question of language has developed into a more complex one (from the late 20th century onwards) because of the spreading of English in international contexts. I will be discussing this point further in the chapter.

rather than alien, eyes? How could local folk culture be integrated with modern art? Such conflicts were never resolved and give the new literatures their strength. Younger writers, educated after national independence, feel such problems less pressingly and treat local society as a given, a reality with a diverse life of its own. The conflict between modernization and asserting a separate usable past, however, remains central to most national literatures and the various post-colonial movements that followed. It could be argued that the international literature of post-colonialism, in all languages, is based on the conflict between what is perceived as the traditional culture of the past and incorporation into a global modern culture. (King 2002: 6-7)

As King has argued, writers and activists which emerged immediately after or even during the period that preceded decolonization and independence, were concerned with voice and speaking out for the nation as a whole. Their focus was on the reaffirmation of a national identity, the establishment of a historical link, and re-appropriation of power. Today, however, I would argue that the objective of the postcolonial form is to express the need of the individual in his/her search for an identity. Contemporary societies have caused the shattering and fragmentation of cultural identity and form. But in doing so, contemporary society also created the right circumstances for the search for identity. Fiction, as film, explores this aspect of contemporary culture. There are many writers, artists or activists who left their countries prior to independence or immediately after, to later return in a search of roots and a culture they can claim as theirs. Younger writers, however, especially second generation immigrant children, of the diaspora in Britain, the United States and Canada, developed new concerns. Either way, culture and cultural identity becomes a malleable and adaptable form within the individual and in the national context.

Indian writing in English assumed a socio-cultural role branching out in many directions. Writers of the diaspora were concerned with the depiction of social, cultural, religious and linguistic representation of immigrant communities. They were also, and to some extent involved in a re-appropriation of a homeland, a remapping of an imaginary geography of belonging, as a necessary format of this literature. The mapping of a cultural identity together with the desire to fit into a new society was adopted as a narrative form. Cultural identity, however, by now fused in with Western imprints such as language, habits, dress, and education, among others gained new hybrid nuances, just as writers gained a space for representation.

Debates on nationality, voice, authenticity, ownership and rights over culture, nation and land were raised in postcolonial narratives. Communities of migrants expressed their South East Asian heritage as much as they expressed their right to integration in a contemporary multi-layered and multi-cultural society. Regardless of location, language, content or form, writers were allowed to express their identity freely. The truth is, the binding lines of authenticity and the right to speak up and give voice to a nation and its culture have been deconstructed as being generalizing structures, dissolved by now with the changes and movements the world and societies have been experiencing since the 1980s. Postcolonial literature has now moved a step beyond the post-colonial. It is not only dealing with a colonial past, with the post-colonial condition and a coming to terms with a national identity. It is by now also exposing the effects of a global culture and economy, the disillusionment and difficulties of integration in new societies and the emotional and psychological difficulties of dealing with the transformations occurring in younger generations when confronted with new cultural realities.

Having gained access to a new democratic global community, Indian identity opened to other social groups as well such as women, Dalits, sexually defined, ethnic or religious groups and other minorities. Individuals created new classifications for themselves, and the world created markets for all forms of socio-cultural and artistic expression. National and cultural creativity as a global phenomenon acquired new meanings in the defence of group rights as beliefs were expressed through artistic freedom. Although artistic expression has always been a political statement it was in the 1960s that it really took shape.

By the end of the 20th century and into the 21st, it was no longer the ideal of national unity that defined a postcolonial or an independent India, but the possibility of the multiplicity of voices that emerged within a newly gained Indian identity that had previously been ignored, repressed or denied rights. It is the social and historical understanding of these minority groups composed through individual stories, and how these are incorporated into the complexities of a national identity that needs now to be discussed. It is not only individual socio-cultural complexities, but the complex process of piecing together a national identity through the ongoing appearance of new voices. A history of silence, of suffering, of anguish, pain and humiliation is now exposed and requires an audience. The multiple voices that form

a nation are what in essence bring out the rich and varied cultural identity which characterizes cultures and societies as we understand them today.

Postcolonialism: the democratization of literature

So what postcolonialism stands for as a defining trend in literary and artistic movements and expression is a turn against formerly established somewhat repressive ideals during colonial and imperial rule. Whereas in the past modes of thinking, the acceptance of difference and social equality as fundamental aspects of socio-cultural identity were kept under strict control or disregarded, in favour of homogeneity and a desire for a superior identity, postcolonialism welcomes this broadened vision of society. Imperialism affected not only former non-European colonies, but was an era in world history that marked all modes of thinking, whether, social, political, academic or philosophical. So in an ongoing understanding of the postcolonial era, even the term challenges itself as the debate develops, the search for identity is filled with creative manifestation of the historical complexities the world experienced.

The reductionist view is that postcolonialism represents a philosophical and ideological trend used to reflect a complex and widespread socio-cultural reality. In narrower terms it can be simply considered a category for a form of literature that emerged of writers from newly independent nations which had been subject to colonial repression and domination. Its basic form is marked by a universal pattern, whether the literature comes from Africa, Asia or the New World, as challenging linguistic and literary canons, or as raising issues on the re-assertion of a lost or forgotten history of a silenced people. Postcolonial literature is characterized by all these factors and motives, but it is also a constantly changing and evolving perspective of contemporary society as experienced and voiced by new social groups and individuals. It seems like in postcolonial art, as in postmodern, there are no limits and no defining laws. This literature, as Roy, Desai, Rushdie and others have proven can be simultaneously raw, crude, truthful and controversial as it can also be imaginative and

powerfully beautiful in metaphor and language in its representation of three realms: the cultural, the social and the individual.

Postcolonialism in literature, or postcolonial literature[53], defines a universal literary movement characterized by the breaking down of social barriers, the crossing of physical and cultural borders, and the awakening of a sense of belonging and unity, a search for Salman Rushdie's "imaginary homelands" (1984) in a world that has been rapidly losing many of its points of reference, and even border lines. India from this point of view is an interesting postcolonial case study:

> There was a riddle I wanted to try and answer, with their help: *Does India exist?* A strange, redundant sort of inquiry, on the face of it. After all, there the gigantic place manifestly is, a rough diamond two thousand miles long and more or less wide, as large as Europe though you'd never guess it from the Mercator projection, populated by around a sixth of the human race, home to the largest film industry on earth, spawning Festivals the world over, famous as the 'world's biggest democracy.' Does India exist? If it doesn't, what's keeping Pakistani and Bangladesh apart?
>
> It's when you start thinking about the political entity, the nation of India, the thing whose fortieth anniversary it is, that the question starts making sense. After all, in all the thousand years of Indian history, there never was such a creature as a united India. Nobody ever managed to rule the whole place, not the Mughals, not the British. And then that midnight, the thing that had never existed was suddenly 'free'. But what on earth was it? On what common ground (if any) did it, does it, stand? (Rushdie 2010: 26-27)

With the Independence of India as a marking moment in itself and as a result of British colonial influence in India over almost 350 years, Indian English writing positioned itself in international literary spheres as an apparently structured, homogenized voice coming from a mixed, complex and dysfunctional Indian society and nation of so many languages, ethnicities, and religious structures. It focused on the essential themes that Western readers were interested in and could identify with as they themselves shared similar concerns. According to Gopal:

[53] The differences in the syntactic construction may also raise further debate on meaning.

> The anglophone Indian novel is part of a heterogeneous corpus in which certain dominant trends, shared concerns, and recurrent themes are, nonetheless, discernible. It is a genre that has been distinguished from its inception by a preoccupation with both *history* and *nation* as these come together to shape what political scientist, Sunil Khilnani (1997) terms, after Nehru, 'the idea of India'. Inasmuch as its very emergence was generated by the colonial encounter, the novel is an ineluctably postcolonial genre; its concern has been with that equally postcolonial entity, the nation-state. English, in India, as many critics have noted, is simultaneously rootless (in the sense of lacking a specific region and cultural context) as well as pan-Indian. (Gopal 2009:5)

The emerging nation state of India gave the Indian novel in English a motif for expression, especially for those writers who managed to establish a connection with European socio-political thought and concerns following decolonization. Again in Gopal's words, it is not,

> so much that the nation is a 'narrated entity' in itself as that the narration of nation gave the Anglophone novel in India its earliest and most persistent thematic preoccupation, indeed its raison d'être, as it attempted to carve out a legitimate space for itself. The conditions of its emergence – out of the colonial encounter, addressing itself to empire rather than a specific region or community – meant that the Anglophone novel in the subcontinent returned repeatedly to a self-reflexive question: 'What is India(n)?' This was to become a question with chronological, metaphysical, religious, personal, political, aesthetic, historical, and geographical dimensions and in the most significant works of fiction, India emerges not just as theme or imaginative object, however, but also as a point of debate, reflection, and contestation. (Gopal 2009:6)

This need to understand nation and construct an identity seemed to unite ideals and motivation for Indian writing in English. The Anglophone novel, as Gopal terms it, so gained form and meaning, and looking back, a reference point: *Midnight's Children* (1981). Rushdie's prized novel could be identified as a pioneering moment in this literary movement due to its experimental form and content which came to dictate the way for subsequent writing and writers. In the same sense and taking on the title of Rushdie's novel as symbolic in meaning, Indian writing in English that followed Independence, that began at the stroke of midnight of 1947 were all midnight's children. Rushdie, as has been repeatedly stated, placed India and the Indian English novel on the literary map. Although many other important writers had published both poetry and prose in English and English translations prior to Salman Rushdie, such as Tagore and even Ghandi, Rushdie's creative distortions of language and

form carved out a new space for this literary form and a new voice for Indian identity in global contexts. The form developed and mutated re-emerging from its own ashes to expose new socio-cultural realities while keeping up with transformations in the political and economic global sphere.

With the advent of Independence a newly discovered freedom of speech emerged among the Indian people, mainly the elite classes – intellectuals, activists, writers, academics, who were now finally able to give voice to their visions of the Indian nation and culture. Not only were they able to express their ideas but also to be heard and recognized for what they were saying about India and the Indian culture. These writers' voices echoed throughout the world, and particularly in the West, as they expressed their feelings on the influence of colonial domination and its imprint on people, society and culture. The history of the lower classes, of the underprivileged, of those secluded from political processes could now, ideally be represented and written about. Not only did voice become a democratic ideal, but also history was shaken free of its binding chains, to be appropriated by everyone. But the trend that followed was one of further dispersion of agency to become all-inclusive and possible through many forms and mediums.

Rushdie in the 80s (not to disregard his later novels), was a pioneering author and cultural agent and others who followed such as and Arundhati Roy in the 90s and Kiran Desai in the new millennium, became responsible for a type of narrative that has been called, by Priyamvada Gopal as a metanarrative and true also as a metahistory, and gained visibility as writers, and especially as Indian writers through their prize-winning novels. As a metanarrative, *Midnight's Children* challenges the barriers of fiction and reality through a depiction of historical events and a questioning of the universal and absolute value of such processes. But many postcolonial novels and poetry by Indian writers and poets writing in English are also important as sociological and anthropological documents that aid in the understanding of the social transformations these people have been experiencing. Examples of this are Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) which depicts the sub-world of New Delhi slums, crime and corruption, and Kamal Das, who in her poem, "An Introduction" from her first collection of poems, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) speaks of her need and right to express her thoughts and feelings in English. Here is an extract from the poem:

I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one.
Don't write in English, they said, English is
Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak,
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone.
It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing
Funeral pyre. (Kamala Das 1965)[54]

Fiction, whether poetry, prose or drama, exposes historical processes through subjective interpretation as an object of academic interest. The gathering and organizing of historical data might involve sociological, analytical or scientific procedures, and these are all possible through fiction and the imagination. When historical reconstruction is possible the democratic gathering of information and agency placed in the hands of all social, economic and political classes and people, then different perspectives will emerge, clash and coincide, but provide a deeper understanding and theoretical ground for analysing national culture and identity. Furthermore, it is not only in perspective that historical accounts may differ, as in style, form, narrative voice, tone and the individuals and events which are depicted. At the dawn of historiography when philosophers began to question the very nature

[54] Accessed at www.poemhunter.com (12/10/2015)

of truth, the authoritative voice was in the hands of the dominant intellectual classes, those who were in power or represented those in power. Others, whether lower classes, the colonized, those considered racially, sexually or socially inferior were denied a voice, because they had no right to one as their status denied it. The perspectives and rights of many social groups were irrelevant to the proper functioning of society and of national processes as a whole.

With the spreading and widening of postcolonial literary themes, as readers, we come to realize that there are many narratives, many histories and many perspectives, as Sai in *The Inheritance of Loss* did. "Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own happiness and live safely within it." (Desai 2006: 323). Another important aspect of postcolonial thought regarding the ownership of history and voice and of democratic countries is that there is, in theory and practice, freedom of speech.

Everyone and anyone regardless of race, class, ethnicity, gender, religion (though there are fundamental beliefs and limitations concerning this), and in most cases age[55], has the freedom and right to an opinion or a voice. And history or narrating a culture and nation, as Sai realizes, is not to be claimed by anyone. No one has ownership over a nation's past and history.

The truth of the matter is, that even though having been previously denied a voice and having no power to voice a personal history, those considered socially inferior were as much a part of a nation's history as any other group as those from whose perspective historical events have been written about. To illustrate this idea, here is an excerpt from *The Inheritance of Loss* about the first man to reach the top of Mount Everest:

> Sai and Gyan had recently made an excursion to see these socks of Tenzig, spread-eagled in the Darjeeling museum adjoining his memorial, and they had taken a good look at them. They had also studied his

[55] Malala, a young Pakistani girl born in 1997 is an example of this. Malala wrote on the right to education for women in a BBC blog under a pseudonym, and appeared in a documentary for *The New York Times* in 2009. In 2011 she was awarded the Pakistani Youth Peace Prize and in 2012 she was shot by the Taliban. In 2014 she won the Nobel Peace Prize. She has become an important voice in women's right to education and a symbol of empowerment for girls and the importance of education worldwide.

hat, ice pick, rucksack, samples of dehydrated foods that he might have taken along, Horlicks, torches, and samples of moth and bats of the high Himalayas.

"He was the real hero, Tenzing," Gyan had said. "Hilary couldn't have made it without the sherpas carrying his bags." Everyone around had agreed. Tenzing was certainly first, or else he was made to wait with the bags so Hilary could take the first step on behalf of that colonial enterprise of sticking your flag on what was not yours.

Sai had wondered, Should humans conquer the mountain or should they wish for the mountain to possess them? Sherpas went up and down, ten times, fifteen times in some cases, without glory, without claim of ownership, and there were those who said it was sacred and shouldn't be sullied at all. (Desai 2006: 155)

With independence, decolonization and the possibility of freedom of speech new laws were defined and the so-called 'subaltern' found their own way into history, just as Tenzig Norgay did. Curiously though, it has been through the elite groups opening doors that the 'subaltern' were given the possibility to stand up and speak out for themselves and their views of nationality. However, there are still many groups in India, as in many parts of the world, and even in Western societies who are still lacking in representation such as the poor, the hungry, the homeless, victims of all forms of abuse and violence. Those who occupied more privileged roles in society defined the structures and voice through which their nation and culture were narrated. Postcolonial writers therefore were attributed the important role of re-defining the laws for a universal understanding of local histories and people as perceived today.

Society is structured on inequalities and on the injustice of its systems, and much of the world's population is unheard and unrepresented for. As postcolonialism increasingly distances itself from a preoccupation with denouncing colonial injustice and with a restorative history, it begins to question and expose other consequences and failures of colonialism, decolonization and the contemporary society all as structures governed by imperial mentalities. It is the role of the postcolonial writer, therefore to become more involved with local communities, with ongoing suffering of social groups, be they at home – in India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya, etc – or in host societies.

Our past, our heritage shapes us, as we are involved in a process of constant reinterpretation. We are also shaped by how present circumstances shed light on our past

experiences. It is through an understanding of the self, according to a spatial-temporal axis, that we are able to experience realities meaningfully and construct an identity based on present circumstance. Present circumstances, however, are determined by historical processes, whether national, social or individual, so in sum, as cultural entities our identity is inseparable from our history. The same applies to culture and cultural identity.

A culturally rich nation such as India is marked by important historical transformations affecting at national and individual levels. The political, social, economic and cultural changes that took place in India following independence have been experienced at all levels in society, although differently and have contributed to the generating of new ideals. Historical processes and how these affect identity should be perceived as a gathering and storing of information in a multi-layered and kaleidoscopic space, rather than as a series of events along a timeline continuum.

What Rushdie accomplished with *Midnight's Children* was a challenge of form, of the historical narrative and of linguistic and narrative structures in an attempt to re-write the story of a nation and to re-create the idea of India and of the possibilities of writing about India – its history, people, its myths, its traditions, its heritage, its voice and the language through which all of this could be written about. Fictional narratives of India written in English since Rushdie have become an allegory of nation, history and identity, or have been read as such.

What is Indian identity, after all?

Novels by postcolonial writers such as *Midnight's Children, The Inheritance of Loss* and *The God of Small Things* are socio-historical tales through which an idea of nation and culture can be constructed. In the present state of the world where people, cultures and languages mix in almost any and every national and social context, an individual will construct his/her identity according to a present day understanding of his/her culture. Cultural heritage and cultural forms are defined according to individual interpretation. It is a combination of cultural forms that define a nation and its borders, distinguishing it from others and of personal experience of culture. But cultures are also defined according to the meaning

and understanding that a global audience attribute to it, and to the interest and demand for more generated by the same global audience.

The writers I have been discussing all possess individual characteristics which differentiate them from each other. Rushdie, Indian born, of Pakistani descent, educated within the British system, today a United States citizen is liable to consider himself Indian, Pakistani, but to be culturally divided between Southern Asian and Western ideals and standards. Roy, born in India is a non-expatriate writer who has chosen to remain in India and produce her work from her homeland, but who writes in English. Kiran Desai, the daughter of internationally acclaimed writer Anita Desai, was also born in India, but moved to the UK at the age of 14 where she proceeded with her education. She is currently living in New York. They are all classified as Indian English writers, writing about India and their novels used to read into India as a nation, and to gain more knowledge on its people, history and culture.

In the eyes of the world, therefore, these writers are attributed authorship over India, Indian identity, Indian history and the Indian people in general. This is because they have opened the gates to a more extensive understanding of India through the creative power of fiction and in doing so, provided a new, broader vision of India and its people in academia, in the literary sphere, and also to any person who is willing to open of these books and read it. Just as these novels are accepted and acknowledged worldwide as national allegories, and considered as postcolonial novels by Indian writers when they challenge and expose so many forms and ideas on what would be considered authentically Indian from language to characters, then too the Indian identity has undergone so many transformations and adapted to new circumstances, that what it is hard to determine what makes someone or a literary form Indian. Sai's *Indianness* is questioned by Gyan (her math tutor) a Gorka nationalist, because he is defending his ethnic origins. This is what he believes in at that particular moment in his life, but Sai is nonetheless Indian, despite her individual challenge of Indian forms:

> She who could speak no language but English and pidgin Hindi, she who could not converse with anyone outside her tiny social stratum.
>
> She who could not eat with her hands; could not squat down on the ground on her haunches to wait for a bus; who had never been to a temple but for architectural interest; never chewed a paan, and had not tried most sweets in the mithaishop, for they made her retch; she who left a Bollywood film so exhausted from emotional

wear and tear that she walked home like a sick person and lay in pieces on the sofa; she who thought it vulgar to put oil in your hair and used paper to clean her bottom; felt happier with so-called English vegetables, snap peas, French beans, spring onions, and feared – feared – loki, tinda, kathal, kaddu, patrel, and the local saag in the market. (Desai 2006:177)

On the other hand, her grandfather, the judge, two generations older than Gyan, resented his wife's *Indianness*, as he felt deeply impressed by the English ways:

In the entrance to the school building was a portrait of Queen Victoria in a dress like a flouncy curtain, a fringed cape, and a peculiar hat with feathery arrows shooting out. Each morning as the Jembhai passed under, he found her froggy expression compelling and felt deeply impressed that a woman so plain could have been so powerful. The more he pondered this oddity, the more his respect for her and the English grew. (Desai 2006:58)

Still each one of these characters is Indian, despite individual interpretations of their nation, culture and identity.

Indian writers who write in English, and diasporic writers have the world as their stage, and their audience may be from India, but they may also be from elsewhere in the world, just as it may also be translated into other languages besides the original in English, resulting in further interpretations. These novels may also be read in other Indian languages through translations.[56] The dimension and unfolding this literature acquires results in a need for a reinterpretation of the concept of the postcolonial subject in the 21st century.

The substance for the postcolonial writer's work is based on Indian realities, but these Indian realities are a personal experience of the nation and culture and the subsequent effects of postcolonialism. All these ideas are subject to interpretation through language, narrative form, character and plot. But the fusion of reality and fiction on which these narratives are constructed is a highly subjective and personal one and may not be readily accepted by either Indian people as a general rule, or by those who look for authentic *Indianness*. But, just as history cannot be conceived as universal truth so too, the construction of a cultural identity

[56] Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* was translated to Bengali and published in Calcutta as *Samanami* and *The God of Small Things* into Malayalam as *Kunju Kaaryangalude Odaya Thampuran*

and its framing within a broader national identity is also a matter of individual choice and perception as well as a personal expression of belonging.

The postcolonial Indian novel in English is a novelty of the past century, a social, linguistic, literary and commercial phenomenon that emerged following the end of British imperialism in South East Asia. Though maybe not through self-conscious incrimination, it came to show that the world was changing and going through interesting social and political transformations. The choice to write in English by Rushdie and other writers his contemporaries was so much a direct result of English linguistic imperialism in India, as it was also to show that English, the language of empire was itself undergoing social transformations. For one, it no longer belonged merely to the British, but had spread through British colonial expansion to many parts of the world like West Africa, the Caribbean, Australia and Canada. It also turned into a common language for many immigrant groups residing in English speaking countries like the Chinese, Jamaican, Mexican or Dominican communities and by second or third generations of Portuguese, Germans, Greeks, Japanese, as others. Decolonization therefore also meant the end of the British Empire, its ideals and the British ideal of the unchanging form of its language.

So language played an important role in colonial presence and domination, and came to play an even more important role in decolonization and in the affirmation of a status for India. Quoting Gopal,

> In 1986, the critic Fredric Jameson (1986: 69) made the controversial claim that all Third World texts were 'national allegories'. He argued that even when such texts seemed to be about individuals' private destinies, they were allegories of the public and political situations of their nations. (Gopal 2009: 93)

Though controversial, debatable and subject to critical attention, by many so-called Third World writers, as Gopal goes on to state, I would argue that there are solid grounds for Jameson's claim in understanding the nationalistic characteristic of postcolonial texts. But not because these texts have been fitted into a neat formula of postcolonial literature whereby they help to reconstruct a missing part of history, but because, as I have been claiming, they are individual affirmations of a cultural identity in an ongoing process of change.

There are many texts written in languages other than English, which are not known to the world and which are not about the usual themes associated with postcolonial writing of inclusion and exclusion, national identity, nation building and historical agency. These texts focus on not so grand, but nevertheless important social issues such as sexuality, poverty, deviancy, family, immigration, and others. These issues and the texts that give them form are also agents in the construction of a national identity. Every social or ethnic group within a society, and the languages and forms through which their identities are expressed, and how each interrelate and connect or disconnect in the formation of a national identity is fundamental in the construction of knowledge on a particular culture and its people. At least, that's how it should be.

In theory, though not always in practice, the world is no longer dominated by elites who intend to restructure mankind and society as a reflection of themselves and their philosophical ideals. Difference is accepted and acknowledged though not always treated with due respect. Although colonial mentalities persist today, they are just as equally feared and praised as they are criticized and challenged. The construction of the whole, of what constitutes nation, identity, history is composed of all the parts, including the smaller ones. The world is built on difference, diversity and inequalities. It is not a homogenous mass, but a constant challenge at bringing together and comprehending unity through difference. So it is impossible to recreate an active and coherent vision of nation without looking into every dimension of the social structure of a nation. And the structure is complex as it is made up of many factors, including also temporal ones which takes us back to the role of history and memory.

Another interesting criticism is made by Aijaz Ahmad who attacks Jameson's use of the term "Third World" Literature. He is in a way shocked by the fact that the First and Second Worlds or nations (terms which are no longer in use) were defined according to their economic and political systems, while the Third World was categorized as such because of having come out of a colonial system imposed on these nations by former European empires. Another striking attack on Jameson's claim he makes is that the texts which are in fact recognized as "national allegories" are those which have once again succumbed to Western, especially American imperialism and are mainstream postmodern texts of a globalized world.

How is it possible to place all of the nations who have been subjected to oppressive political systems into a single category and call their literature by the same name? Would the same be possible and accepted in First World nations? (Ahmad 1987)

The end of colonialism theoretically meant the end of repression and the possibility for new groups to emerge and to speak out for themselves. Although at many other levels and through alternative literary and social spheres, other voices are also right now making themselves heard without any knowledge of their existence in the Western world, Indian writing in English became an important voice for India in the postcolonial and later globalized era. It became important, however, because it reached a Western audience which could in effect mean that the world, despite the example of history, with its social and political movements, has not overcome Western imperialism. Western readers, critics and literary spheres welcomed this literature as opposed to others written in vernacular languages or which perhaps touched on different literary or cultural themes. What may have authentically began as a political and cultural statement against former colonizers turned against itself as it was accepted and appropriated by the former colonial voice as well. Writers such as Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga become agents of Western society producing the documents discuss and represent those themes of nation, culture, history and social nature, in a way that is comprehensible and acceptable in the Western metropolis and in contemporary literary spheres. There is a certain ideological and theoretical frame to the design of these novels which is compatible with Western thought. On the part of the writers, who as has been said before, are themselves an elite group, there is a conscious motivation behind the conception and production of these narratives. Not much is accidental in the way these novels are structured. To quote, rather extensively, Boehmer on the subject,

> They have developed what was anyway a cosmopolitan tendency, often picked up as part of an élite upbringing in their home countries. This fact may not appear important to their writing as such. But it is fundamental in explaining their reception and status as privileged migrants in the West, and the imaginative confidence they demonstrate in straddling cultural worlds. Because of their connections or their upbringing, they have tended sooner or later to win acceptance in metropolitan élites. Essentially, they have been able, by migrating, to secure for themselves a different, more comfortable location in the wider neo-colonial world.

> But as the compounded privilege, if nothing else, of many of the writers suggest, their work willy-nilly remains collusive with and an expression of that neo-colonial world. Crudely put, the promotion of postcolonial migrant writing offers a suggestive instance of the appropriation by Europe and America of resources in the Third World. The Western powers that retain the economic and military upper hand in relation s with the ex-colonial territories are also the countries in which migrant literature is given wide support in the form of advances, publicity and prizes. (Boehmer 2005:232)

And she follows on with a critique of this Western position, arguing the fact that these "Third World" novels are being promoted in the West, but immigration laws are becoming tighter, just as social policies and equal rights for all continue to be discussed. So who in fact could be said to be in control of who gets to write, who is read and what is written about at this point? The hybridity that characterizes expatriate writers or the cultural elite of India puts them in a position of social and economic advantage. They no longer have one foot in India and one foot in the West, but have now been drawn into a position of apparent power where perhaps they are nothing more than puppets being manipulated by an even stronger political and economic power called Western capitalism.[57]

One of the main characteristics and focal points of postmodernism as a movement which emerges at a time of globalization, capitalism and social fragmentation is the loss of perspective and of reference. From here on, as nations begin to lose their strength as unified forms, cultures begin to disintegrate and the individual, rather than the social entity emerges through a constructed identity, not connected or rooted to anywhere or anyone in particular. What constitute identity in the postmodern Westernized sense are brief, superficial factors, easily and rapidly changeable. So though these novels may give the world and especially Western readers some insight on India, Indian culture, history and its people, it is by no means a wholesome product. It is a fragmented fictional and philosophical statement on India which may help us to better understand the reality, not only of India, but of the current state of the world.

[57] It is also important to mention that all these writers, Rushdie, Roy, Desai and Adiga have been awarded the Man Booker Prize over the past 40 years. The Booker effect is also influential in the propagation and endorsing of this literature, encouraging more writers, more of the same theme and style and further considerations for future prizes or shortlistings. All this implies that the economic, political and ideological machine is at work behind the production of these novels.

Globalization and how it affected postcolonial fiction

Every aspect of a society, as I have argued, is relevant in the construction of a national identity, so every novel written in the postcolonial and postmodern context is inevitably, somehow, read as a text of national allegory. Being so, it helps to construct an idea of the past and to define and understand the present. Indian literature in English enabled the representation of many voices and dialects as a single unit in a nation divided by class, caste, religion and language. English as a literary medium, and not only literary[58], suggests a globalized India. This can be a positive aspect of contemporary society if it means increasing cultural, economic, commercial and political ties between India and Western nations. But it can also be a negative aspect when we consider the destructive impact globalization has had on local customs and traditions. Globalizing India, however, also brought about the internationalization of Indian literature which went along with the internationalization of English literature.

This emergence of Indian literature in English or English literature about India, depending on the cultural perspective by which we decide to analyse these literary phenomena, arrives at a time when the world comes into contact with a number of culturally, philosophically and economically marking phenomena. The 20th century was one of many important advances in science and technology, international conflicts and wars, many significant social changes and transnational movements. Worldwide, culture and societies were greatly affected and transformed by the impact of globalization which grew stronger and more far reaching as we entered the 21st century.

The advances in technology and transport brought people together and allowed for mass movements around the world. Different from the travelling and contact with new lands and people between the 15th and 19th century, ending with decolonization in the 20th century, immigration resulted in the cultural melting pots. Peoples and communities of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds came to inhabit the same urban spaces. With this new contact between people of different cultures and nationalities difference and diversity had to be

[58] English became a linguistic medium not only for literature, but other arts as well as also for politics, administration and education.

accepted as fundamental elements in an evolving world. The opposite reactions of discrimination, xenophobia and racism have only led to crime, the creation of urban ghettos, poverty, illness and unemployment, just to mention the main problems of non-inclusive social policies. And finally, the English language has been further pushed forward as an international medium for communication to the extent that today a local version of the language has been adopted by almost every nation of the world.

The positive effect and power of globalization has been in managing to shift boundaries and dividing lines and in bringing everyone closer in the dissemination and fusion of culture and cultural forms. But, on the other hand, as cultural forms began to mix and dissolve into each other, individuals, communities and nations begin to lose touch with their roots as a source of identity. The world we live in and how we understand it, becomes fragmented and loose. This can result in moments of anxiety and loss, especially in large, cosmopolitan, modern urban centres, which lack solid references of cultural heritage for individuals to hold onto. The consequences are for individuals to isolate themselves and create personal spaces for identity – the home, the imagination, the family album, and today, with the increasing power of the internet, social networks, online games and blogs. It is in these spaces that individuals who have lost or have never had any sort of reference find refuge.

Postmodernism stands for this feeling of displacement precisely. In literature it is manifested by the apparent disconnection between meaning and form to represent the meaningless world we inhabit. When moving to urban centres individuals may find themselves detached from their identity and thrown into a society where they feel anonymous and incoherent. In this fragmented world where the traditions are found, sometimes simultaneously occupying the very same space, in museums, markets, and festivals, individuals must construct a meaningful existence and slide into a(n) (un)comfortable 21st century ideal of identity. In the artist this redefinition is done imaginatively and creatively and it may be a liberating experience as new worlds, societies are created from the piecing together of older forms, memories, relationships, bits of information, etc. “It is a context which, despite its brutal beginnings, permits the artist to rethink old hierarchies, to experience an openness to influences from everywhere, and to explore the emergence of new forms of hybridity.” (Dash 2002: 50-51)

This hybridity is expressed in language, form, content and in the interpretation and questioning of values of historical, national and ideological weight. In "Psychology, Creolization and Hybridization" (2002) Michale J. Dash discusses the process of creolization, not only of languages, which is the most obvious, but of other cultural practices which are fundamental in the formation of identity following colonialism.

> The use of the term Creole from the outset points to the unpredictable nature of this particular system of economic exploitation. Creole has traditionally been used to distinguish that which is created in the colonies which is neither native nor derives directly from the culture of origin. It is used to describe both someone born in the colonies and some new cultural or linguistic forms created from the juxtaposition of diverse populations. The term already suggests the later hypothesis of creolization that the oppressed and the exploited were not merely the passive victims of an oppressive system, but rather, through a pattern of apparent consent, opposition, and overt resistance, managed to create unprecedented cultural transformations from a series of dialectical relations that united oppressor and oppressed. (Dash 2002: 46)

As Dash also points out, through art and literature there appears to be a certain harmony and a positive outcome of a complex past of colonial relations between oppressors and the oppressed. And as former colonial powers welcome creole or postcolonial artistic expressions, there also seems to be a strange sense of regret or an attempt at erasing the violence, oppression, domination and slavery to which colonized people and nations were subject. The coming to terms with the past on both sides of the colonial experience and its aftermath gives way to the emergence of new cultural and artistic forms and practices. Former colonized people become carriers of culture and tradition which they interpret and express through the re-examining of historical processes at different stages in their past. All this however is understood in the light of the present. So it is a constantly moving rather than static process which involves an inner (psychological, emotional) and outer (social, interactional) conflict in the search and construction of identity and meaning as well as belonging. Questions are raised at all levels of understanding identification (personal, theoretical, sociological, historical and scientific) of what it means to belong and to be and feel a part of a group, community, society, culture or nation.

Despite the weight of a colonial past and the historical void of colonized people's experience in the writing of many postcolonial and creole writers and poets, historical factors are always present. It is possible to understand what history meant for the inheritors of a colonial past through a reading of the narratives in the structure in which they are exposed and expressed. The restorative historical writing, the fragmented individual, the non-linearity of events, the deconstruction of formerly established socio-cultural values and the disillusion when confronted with new realities are important elements in these writers' work. The words on the pages become the voice of unheard history, a different version of the events that is revealed through imaginative construction:

> Chacko told the twins that though he hated to admit it, they were all Anglophiles. They were a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away. He explained to them that history was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside.
>
> 'To understand history,' Chacko said, 'we have to go inside and listen to what they are saying. And look at the books and pictures on the wall. And smell the smells. (Roy 1997: 52)

You have to interpret your own past and your own identity out of what is already there. The democratization and liberalization of history and historical writing made possible because of decolonization and the emergence of new political voices, meant the reassessment of the past and the possibility to reinterpret that which was once accepted as unconditional truth. And so, Chacko goes on,

> 'But we can't go in,' Chacko explained, 'because we've been locked out. And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves.' (Roy 1997: 53)

The war Chacko tells the twins about is the conflict between a nations' past and the path that they have now chosen to follow; a path that implies transformations at many levels. Language, history, culture, religion, traditions and origins are confronted with assimilative

processes whereby new forms, cultures and ideas are adopted and reemerge as imaginative recreations. The end result, which is in fact no end, but a beginning or a creative process with no ending is a branching out in many directions, many possibilities, many voyages in search for identity and meaning. In the words of Caribbean poet Derek Walcott,

> The bowsprit, the arrow, the longing, the lunging heart—
> the flight to a target whose aim we'll never know,
> vain search for one island that heals with its harbor
> and a guiltless horizon, where the almond's shadow
> doesn't injure the sand. There are so many islands!
> As many islands as the stars at night
> on that branched tree from which meteors are shaken
> like falling fruit around the schooner *Flight*.
> But things must fall, and so it always was,
> on one hand Venus, on the other Mars;
> fall, and are one, just as this earth is one
> island in archipelagoes of stars.[59]

And along the same lines, Arundhati Roy, "Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story." (Roy 1997:33) History and meaning, Roy intends to show, are not only constructed through the writing, reading and learning of great events, but also through the recounting of small stories, the small events, the silenced voices of people that sometimes no one hears of. So piecing together the small details and people that have been buried by a dominant historical perspective results in the construction of many important stories. This is precisely the role that postcolonial writers have assumed. The problem with this approach is that identity, writing and perspective have become so distanced from the broader perspective of historical truth to become so personal, so minutely detailed and so uprooted from anywhere in

[59] From "The Shooner *Flight*" in Walcott, Derek (1986) *Collected Poems 1948-1984* Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York.

particular, that individuals no longer know for sure where they belong. Furthermore, there is a feeling, which I can almost safely claim to be felt by most people living in urban centres, of not being able to swim against the current. We seem to be constantly manipulated by the media, by politicians, by artistic movements, by renaissance movements of any kind and it becomes increasingly difficult to assume a firm, original position of self-authority over one's identity. Quoting Chacko once again:

> 'Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows will never be sad enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives never important enough. To matter.' (Roy 1997:53)

Contrary to Chacko's perspectives on the importance of defining identity in a postcolonial and postmodern setting, the value of hybridity rests its foundations precisely on the search for meaning in a mixed up world. And curiously enough, the Western world is so void of depth that what was once considered irrelevant, inferior or useless about native African, Asian or American cultures are now being appropriated by individuals and groups in need of inner substance.[60] The awareness of other cultures, of the hybridity brought on by colonialism and of the emergence of new forms may have contributed to the disappearance of many traditional forms and practices, but it has also contributed to the emergence of new ones. Furthermore, it has added extra value and meaning to a world trying to make sense of itself.

The idea of hybrid or creole identities may be understood as a powerful statement in itself. It is not necessarily a transitional state, a state of liminality where people of a certain culture are moving or transforming, as in a rite of passage to another state of being, another form of culture: Indian to American, or British. It can, in fact be, considered, and assumed by communities and individuals who are characterized by this state, as an identity per se. This state brings hybrid identities represented through and in postcolonial narratives closer to the postmodern discourse. The "obsession with displacement, wandering, and incompleteness

[60] By this claim, I mean the return to roots through organic and rural movements, music, clothes, spirituality, and others.

constitutes a vital link with post-modern poetics." (Dash 2002:52) These factors are present in the language, identified in the characters, in the narrative structure and context of the novels as the text moves in an unstable ground between the traditional and the new. And the writer or "poet is neither a spokesman for the original nor does he master the precursor's text but enters into a translational relationship with a chain of resonances released within a literary tradition." (Dash 2002: 52) Traditional and standard values for narrative structures and linguistic formulas are set free and released from their binding categories and defining forms. Consequently, the postcolonial narrative form gains a theoretical backbone.

> Post-modernism offers a general theoretical context that allows creolization and hybridity to evolve with a reinforced philosophical grounding. In particular, translational theories share with a Creole poetics the rethinking of traditional hierarchies and the assumption of binarist thought. In the same way that the process of creolization favours reversals, contradictions, and recombinations, and calls into question the idea of sacred origins and pure beginnings, so post-modern thought challenges the solemnities of the text as true representation or the primordial notion of the original. If, as two of the most influential thinkers in post-modernism, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, have argued, nothing exists outside discourse and the text, and the text is incapable of a faithful rendering of reality outside itself, then the text is destabilized and always incomplete. Since no definite version is possible, the only reality is that of endless reproduction or extension of the resonances of previous texts. In interrogating notions of centre and originality, postmodernism shares with a Creole aesthetic the need to assert a kind of creative openness. In this way source texts are rejuvenated as older cultural forms are reanimated in the process of creolization. (Dash 2002:52-53)

In postmodernism there is a focus on finding meaning in a fragmented world, or with portraying the displaced individual as a product of the inadaptability to a contemporary hostile society. The novel, like visual arts and film take these postmodern concerns and adapt them to particular realities. As Michael Dash has observed in the citation above, many times we find that mimicry, parody or references to European classics in literature, art and cinema are a common element in the postmodern text. The postcolonial novel is free in a sense to use and apply creative adaptation of older models influenced not only by the experience of changing traditions and shifting values, but also by personal experience. The postmodern text can offer reinterpretation of older, referential names with two main aims in mind. On the one hand it shows that times have changed, and with changing times, perspectives, opinions and

beliefs also have to adapt. On the other hand, references and mimicry emphasize the disbelief, disillusion and loss of respect for what was once considered important and as a defining structure.

Another important aspect of postmodernist fiction is the preoccupation with the local and the universal. This can be understood in two senses. On the one hand, the adapting of local cultures to larger universal settings, through the opening up of borders, and the ease at which all cultures are made available and accessible in the world today. On the other hand, how larger, cosmopolitan societies open up to the assimilation of local communities and other cultures that consequently gain new meanings in a new context. This is also understood through what Bruce King has termed "the internationalization of literatures". The internationalization of literatures has broadened the range of influences and opened up smaller literary and cultural circles to new developments and transformations in language, literature and culture in general. It has done so through the opening of cultural and geographical borders, through the development of the economic market and technology and through the mobility and adaptability of people and forms to new contexts.

This new concept of literature, which in South Asian literature emerges after Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, besides being somewhat loosely rooted in its cultural, historical social origins and reflecting socio-political transformations in Indian society, most notably in language, identity and cultural factors, it is also a direct result, and a reflection of the economic context of the world today. We live in a world where everyone is, far from beginning to question, now overtly making of the subject of difference and diversity a strong socio-political statement. There is a certain remorse, regret or feeling of guilt attached to the colonial experience in the minds of younger generations of former colonial powers. And as we witness rapid changes in societies, the disappearance and re-emergence of cultural forms and traditions, the shifting of values, the free flow of individuals and the loss of references, new literatures become an active and refreshing response to contemporary realities. Readers and critics who experience or witness the socio-cultural changes that characterize the world today, "respond favourably to the internationalization of the new literatures in English because they themselves are the products of larger intellectual, social, and political movements that cut across most national identities and interests." (Dharwadker 2002: 64)

Many postcolonial novels adopt a position of social activism, so to say, through their resorting to social realism as opposed to magical realism. The depiction of economic and social differences in societies and communities, as well as the portrayal of class or minority identity group struggle is present in both *The Inheritance of Loss* and in *The God of Small Things*. But we also find a touch of creative genius in these novels in the fictional characterization of colonial settings and influences, in characters and their surroundings, in the language that appears more playful than serious and in the imagery. In both Roy and Rushdie criticism of conservative attitudes and neo-colonial ideas are masqueraded with metaphor, imagery and playful tone. This is magical realism. In Rushdie as in other non-European writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez we identify it by when the writer,

> He or she chooses verbal density and narrative opacity over imagistic transparency, hyperbole and exaggeration over ironic understatement, fluid or protean form over balanced design and coherent symbolism, openness over closure, and strangeness and defamiliarization over familiarity and recognition. […] Much more than the modernist novelist, he or she seeks to mutate and metamorphose rather than to fix, to invent and create rather than to document or record, and to imagine rather than to imitate. In the process, he or she makes fiction the truest representation of a reality that is indistinguishable from unreality. (Dharwadker 2002:70)

There is a definite movement from the intended and idealized colonial order to a post-colonial disorder. This notion of "disorder" however is intentional. It stands as a form of resistance to the image of a homogenized, uniform society, language, structure and linearity. It is a breaking with the past, a disruption from the colonial idea of a well-structured, functional strong centre that controlled and subjugated the peripheries. The borderlines that marked the difference and which controlled and maintained these relations of power and subjugation have faded or have been forced to stretch as a result of the contemporary state of the world today. The centre had been weakened in its original ideals, as other values, such as the importance of diversity, cultural mixing and freedom from formerly established restrictive laws become of more value in a post-colonial, multi-cultural, pluri-ethnic world. Post-colonial writers strongly emphasize these ideas in the texts.

> On the one hand, the shift is from colonial subjection to post-colonial freedom, and from homogenous, centralized cultures to decentred, multicultural societies. On the other hand, it is also a transition from the order of law and consensus to the disorder of guerilla warfare and international terrorism, and from the Third World in India or Somalia to the Third World within London. […] Rather, it is a part of a wider international movement towards a still indeterminate 'new world order', in which magic realism seems to be a principal experimental or innovative mode of representation and self representation in languages ranging from Spanish and Italian to Japanese and Urdu. (Dharwadker 2002:71)

What this chapter is culminating to is the idea that we have entered a new critical, philosophical and theoretical stage in the process of rethinking and assessing existence in general. What was apparently, at one stage, in the past centuries a world that could be somewhat easily controlled socially, politically and economically, has now brutally imploded in on itself as a result of excessive dominant ideological endeavours. The imperialistic expansionist motivations behind colonialism backfired. As a result former African, Asian, Latin American and Caribbean people appropriated fragmented ideals of the modern democratic nation state and attempted to reconstruct new societies, new political systems, new economies and to apply the colonizer's mother tongue. New cultural forms and practices, regardless of their success or failure, emerged. The world gained new cultures, new languages and new social practices.

Shifts in social, political and geographical systems meant the freedom of movement, immigration, travel, and the contact with new realities. The nature of urban centres in Western nations also changed as people from all round the world had to be integrated with the creation of employment, living conditions, educational systems and the acceptance of foreign practices and customs as a new reality.

Postcolonial literature has moved a step forward to no longer only denounce the violence of colonial rule and the effect it had on subjugated people, and to try to represent the past and present in a coherently democratic form through fiction. Postcolonial literature today is representative of the mixed state the world finds itself in. In this sense, the novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai are well positioned in the context of a contemporary reading of postcolonial and postmodern societies and people, but they are products of individual perception and in this sense subjective and creative portrayals of cultural identity. They push

both forward and backwards in the understanding of the present. Both novels represent the fact that the world, texts, cultures, landscapes or languages are always there. It is how they are expressed and transformed in time and how we interpret them in the present moment that is truly important. It is not out of coincidence that *The God of Small Things* ends with the word "Tomorrow" (Roy 1997: 340) though the story itself is only half way, taking us back to an earlier point in the narrative prior to Velutha's death, but providing us (the reader) with a different perspective of that moment. Desai begins and ends her narrative with a different description of Mount Kanchenjunnga. In the first paragraph she writes,

> All day, the colours had been those of dusk, mist moving like water creature across the great flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light, a plume of snow blown high by the storms at its summit. (Desai 2006:1)

Whereas by the end of her narrative she writes, "The five peaks of Kanchenjuga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent. All you needed to do was reach out and pluck it." (Desai 2006: 324).

We have reached a stage in world history and in the understanding of philosophical movements and theories that serve to define mankind and cultures where every form is changeable, just as every structure may be challenged. The very idea of the postcolonial is being challenged and reinterpreted as new forms and modes of expression emerge. The postcolonial describes a changing world, a fragmented world, a fragile world of individuals made up of the same unstable characteristics. But it also describes a world where we are free as individuals to make choices and express ourselves in such a way whereby dialectics of nation are adapted to how our cultural identities are subjectively represented in the present. To end this chapter, I quote again with a single verse from "The Shooner *Flight"* by Derek Walcott which summarizes my idea on the point of departure and everything that follows in the making and construction of meaning in the postcolonial novel: "I had no nation now but the imagination." (Walcott 1986)

3

On ethnographic writing and fictional narratives

The theme of much of what I write, fiction as well as non-fiction, is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless, circular conflict they're engaged in. John Berger, that most wonderful writer, once wrote: Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one. There can never be a single story. There are only ways of seeing.[1] So when I tell a story, I tell it not as an ideologue who wants to pit one absolutist ideology against another, but as a story-teller who wants to share her way of seeing. (Roy 2007)

In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*. The fact is (or, it follows) that writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy, call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the act by which it is uttered – something like the *I declare* of kings or the *I sing* of very ancient poets. (Barthes 1968)

Reflections on ethnography and the narrative

In the 1st chapter "On historical constructions and the power of narratives" I discussed the writing of history, and how fictional narratives may also be understood as historical documents. In the 2nd chapter "Situating the novels in postcolonial critical theory and its ongoing discussion" I analysed the novels within a postcolonial and postmodern context with an emphasis on the power of the individual in this process. In this present chapter, I am going to discuss the relation between fiction and cultural anthropology, how the practices and poetics are interrelated through the act of writing and the subjective characteristics both share; and on how the narrative may be used to understand cultural roles and practices. Using the novel as the site for field study, fictional evocations of space, time, structure, characters and linguistic features help us to construct an idea of India, its people and communities.

I am here expanding on thoughts which emerge at a time of changing perspectives associated with the many disciplines which have traditionally defended objectivity and factual analysis or observation as a prerequisite for scientific credibility and the value of truth. My argument is also based on the premise that fiction is fundamental to the understanding of cultural life, with its people, whether as individuals or as a collective, their practices and in the reconstruction of events. Literature, or rather, fiction exposes life and as such, though not a factual science gains relevance in cultural studies. Because of the subjectivities it involves, the depiction of cultural practices moves closer to the act of storytelling and as such acquires a deeper, more personal, more emotional and more aesthetic form resembling fiction. Furthermore, fiction, and art in general, give voice and power to those who were previously denied either or both, and help those people, whose defining terms have already been mentioned in this thesis – the indigenous, the subaltern, the forgotten by history, the voiceless, the minority or even, the individual (any individual), the communities or social groups - that have been ignored or considered irrelevant in narrating of a nation.

What I am proposing is that to fully understand life in its entirety, we must be open to reading, hearing and understanding every story; to see it as a collage of stories and perspectives, told from different levels and angles, rather than as a one sided perception of events. All accounts of events are relevant, and fundamental, in the assembling of truth, and in the writing and understanding of a nation, its culture and history. So be it an ethnographer jotting down observations on the social practices of a group of people, or an anthropologist interpreting human social behaviour, or any other social scientist or psychologist trying to understand how humans interact and why they behave the way they do, the aim will always be to better comprehend humankind by providing a more detailed and accurate picture of the reality of events. But the process of recording human behaviour, from observation to the taking down of notes through to the end product of a written ethnography, a documentary or a theory on human behaviour, always involves some form of subjectivity. The human eye and human perception are connected to the brain, which in turn is connected to our emotions, which belong inevitably to the cultural environment that produced each and every one of us. In the same way, art – through visual arts, film, or literature is also a way of interpreting and making sense of the world and of humankind through subjective expression. When the

possibilities for artistic expression are opened allowing for self-expression, challenging institutionalized forms or preconceived ideas on authenticity and representation of cultural or social identities, then these voices become agents of social, cultural and historical change. These 'indigenous' artists become the creators of new ethnographies, new histories and narrate a new vision of cultural possibility within their nations' history.

Because fiction is creative writing and not a factual or objective cultural analysis, in the past it wasn't considered relevant to the understanding of the world. Fiction, however, even as a creative exercise has proved to be valuable in the construction of knowledge on people and the world not as a science based on factual observation, but as an expression, a reflection or an evocation of the social, cultural, political or historical circumstances. The opening of these new spaces for representation mentioned above come about with the emergence of cultural studies, along with art – music and the visual arts, and fiction gaining an increasingly important place in the understanding of the world today.

The narrative style of *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The God of Small Things* are hard to define in terms of form, but still these texts can be regarded as contemporary manifestations of cultural, philosophical, social, political or economic trends and concerns of postcolonialism. The characteristic which defines this category of fiction is the staging of the socio-political context through the plot and the characters, the narrative techniques and the language all working together to produce a specific meaning and effect. The choices the author makes, therefore, serve a purpose and have an ideological function. For one, the narrative reminds us that the authors and novels are shaped by social phenomena such as transnational mobility, the development of society in a post-colonial context, the transformations of language and the assimilation of new cultural forms. But there is also the political motivation, since people formerly dominated by colonialism now have the opportunity to express themselves in a hybrid tone, rising above the condition of silence to which they were subject to at the time of colonization.

The adoption of the English language, and the transformations the language has been subject to in the narratives are an example of the transformations that have occurred in Indian society and how these are represented through the narrative. I have already discussed this in the two previous chapters. The fictional content and context of the novels are commonly

motivated by political factors, whether historical or current and so can also be considered as either subtle or outright forms of active protest.

Considering these novels as examples of postmodern texts, then the form, content, plot and style will be considered as being reflective of the postmodern condition of fragmentation, the loss of identity, the search for meaning and a critique of the metanarrative. Contemporary society creates instabilities because of the interworking of difference, because of the conflict between the traditional and the technological, because of the constant transformations that occur at such speed and because of the cultural emptiness that grows as homogeneity and globalization spread. All this is exposed in the contemporary novels by these two Indian writers. What Roy and Desai appear to be doing is to denounce the fragile nature of the postcolonial postmodern world while simultaneously exhibiting the cultural traits that define their *Indianness* and their idea of India.

The preservation of cultural forms is a fundamental aspect of the postcolonial contemporary novel, even when shifting values and transformations are explored in the themes. It is essential to retain cultural forms and heritage, in a world where these values seem to be disappearing at a fast rate. Some, if not many postcolonial novels also portray changing cultural realities, such as the experience of diaspora, second or third generations in diasporic communities and their evolving social and cultural values. There are novels whose main focus is the experience of South East Asian individuals, families or communities, while there are others that focus on diaspora as one of the many aspects of postcolonial, contemporary Indian cultural reality. In either case, cultural forms, depicted through language, social practices, structures and behaviour are always present in these novels.

In the two novels that I am here discussing another fundamental aspect to explore within this context of contemporary social and cultural reality is the form of the narrative. These two female authors have opted for narrative styles which defy standard forms and structures, not only in their writing, but also in their perspectives on the representation of life, how it evolves and gains shape and how it manifests itself chronologically. Events occur along a historical timeline – these events being small ones, at individual, personal or emotional levels, or big, embracing large social, economic or political movements and clashes. In the novel, however, the author, characters and narration are given the liberty to jump back and

forth, to move in and out of the self, and to place themselves at the heart of an event or fact, either as participants or observers, or to resort to memory, flashbacks, reflections or even delusion for the telling of a particular story or event.

This is made clear in both Roy's and in Desai's novels as the reader is faced with a non-linear depiction of events. And characters deal with their personal issues, making sense of their lives, existence and identity by returning to events, and perceiving them in a different light according to shifting moments in the unfolding of historical and social circumstances.

As argued in my first chapter and subjacent in the whole development of my ideas, in the scientific theory of historical writing the claim is that the depiction and writing of history must be objective and factual and follow a linear or chronologically clear development of events. Anthropological writing is also a discipline that follows strict rules of objective observation and transference of visible structures and practices into the development of a science of human social behaviour. Both of these scientific practices follow, according to academic practice, an objective methodology, remaining clean of subjective and imaginative impurities brought on by the human need to fantasize and analyse according to individual perception, vision, ideal and interpretation. And human perception is vulnerable and changeable according to many factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic. The novel, with its fictional narrativity and the creative power and ability to reconstruct worlds through the imagination, has come to challenge the unquestionable authority of the former two disciplinary practices.

From an inner dimension we are moved by our emotions, our motivations, by our ability to deal with adversity, and according to the oscillations which challenge our existential stability; our ability to interpret the world around us and how it affects us. From an external dimension, we humans are affected by many factors that shake and move the world and spaces we occupy at a given time. These factors are social, related with people and social movements, trends and influences that surround us and shape us as social beings interacting with others; political, which define how societies and systems of thought are organized and are the major influence in oppressive or liberating moments in history; economic, which rule over social and political systems and movements, defining how much freedom we have as individuals or

nations. There are also philosophical and religious influences which affect both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

All the factors that I referred to in the previous paragraph affect us as humans in all our daily practices and interactions, as they affect us as professionals: academics and scientists, also human and not machines. Human perception is therefore flawed, played with, subject to interference as we are creatures of thought, and thought is always connected to circumstance, memory and emotions. And when human perception is expressed through writing, which is, at any rate, a form of art, creative and stylistic powers and subjective influences are at work, always, regardless of the nature of the writing.

Fiction, therefore is able to challenge the theoretical position that has defined the objective qualities of history and anthropology. In fiction, the author is able to observe, research, report, depict, define, analyse and interpret, but is also free to move in and out of fact and reality, shifting between the factual and the imaginary and free to move closer or to distance him/herself from whatever the narrative is creating.

There are dangers in this. For one, when a novel tends or tries to be too historical, it may be the object of criticism for failing to correspond to factual expectations about events and their formal interpretation. On the other hand, it brings new depth and meaning to occurrences, as the author gives voice to those who were previously not written about, such as the oppressed, the silenced voices, or just the everyday person. And a new dimension is added to the telling of historical events where the private and personal is exposed. We, as scholars, students or readers are allowed to enter this new sphere of perception and in doing so, not only do we learn about what caused a war, but we are also given the possibility to explore on what any human, who witnessed or suffered or fought in that war felt, thought, experienced, and learned about that war. And the most interesting fact about the fiction is that the reader is also able to delve into the experience of those who were not involved in the war while it was taking place, a conscious and deliberate withdrawal from the expectations to raise awareness of a totally new reality. We are therefore given insight into people and events through personal experience and this is only possible through fiction because fiction is narrative and the narrative is an evocation of life.

Fiction can focus on the big political or historical events, such as wars or revolutions, emphasizing new aspects and perspectives, but can also work around the smaller subjacent links which were also part of the story and the elements which were also involved but never mentioned or given any sort of relevance. *The God of Small Things* for example is constructed around a denunciation of the social and religious inequalities in Kerala. The Ipe family are Syrian Christian of higher caste, while Velutha is a Paravan, an Untouchable. It also describes political issues such as the election of the communist party for government.[61] But we are also given insight and perspective into Velutha as a human being, and the satirical representation of a communist character through "Comrade Pillai". In the same way, Desai's narrative is set to the background of the Ghorka uprising in the 80s as the Indian Nepalis demanded an independent state, but focuses on the experience and inner conflicts of Gyan, a young boy in love with Sai but torn between his political and ethnic duties and his emotions.

The characters in the story with their experiences and their suffering, their practices and interactions are all relevant in the writing of the narrative. Furthermore, depiction, interpretation, experience and reasoning on events take on new angles and new approaches. Firstly, these structural practices in the construction of meaning move from the internal to the external, as characters are given the possibility to express feelings and to share thoughts. Secondly, observation and experience are shaped by the perception of a new, emerging social element or layer, which may be considered as the 'everyone' and 'anyone'. Everyone or anyone is given a voice and emotional depth in fiction. Experience of anything from a family quarrel, to the death of a loved one, to the mass killing because of oppressive political ideologies that shaped nations and their interests is understood from a new angle, the personal one. Historical, social, economic, political or anthropological realities or facts are in this way re-defined or reworked through the narrative according to character experience and the transformations which spaces undergo over time. This creative, artistic and cognitive processing of information allows for multiple possibilities of expression and consequently, new interpretations of the narrative.

[61] "In March 1957 Kerala became the first Indian state – and indeed the first government anywhere in the world – to bring a democratically elected communist party to power." (Tickell 2007: 28)

There is yet one other important point that I would like to discuss before moving onto the specific discussion of these aspects in the novels of Roy and Desai. The depiction of social, political and economic events through fiction, besides being shaped by the factors referred to in the previous paragraph, are also shaped by regional, cultural and linguistic features or influences. An event may be explored or analysed from an external, outsider perspective, who from a distance, will try to apply an objective eye and use standard, formal language in the reporting of a particular situation. This would be the role of the historian or anthropologist, an outsider with a scientific perspective, though not actually emotionally or actively involved in the construction of events. In fiction, and especially in fiction that depicts social, cultural or political realities through the construction of local scenes and relations, the starting point is ethnically and locally motivated. Realities are no longer just realities, but are realities shaped by regional characteristics recognizable in language or dialect, in the cultural metaphors that define the region and through the local experience of events and the acting out of daily practices and interactions, according to the weight and value that these aspects have within a specific cultural setting or group. An arranged marriage, for example is interpreted differently when read about or described from an anthropological, sociological or scientific historical perspective, but gains a whole new meaning when understood through the experience and perspective of those involved in the practice. In the same way, going to the cinema has one meaning in Western society, but may have a totally different meaning in Indian society. In *The God of Small Things* Estha and Rahel have their own experience of going to the "Abilash Talkies". Fiction allows readers this insight by stepping into the lives of characters – their fears, frustrations, motivations, traumas and desires.

The crisis which affected anthropology as a discipline, which also resulted in the reflections compiled in the book edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture* (1986), may also be associated with the shattering of the idea of culture and cultural forms as stable, fixed structures, itself a consequence of the universal experience of a world undergoing deep structural, social, political, and cultural changes. Like nations, languages, borders and cultures also shift, change and disappear over the decades, and in the same way science and art have developed a stronger and closer relationship over time. The lines that separated one from the other have also blurred and what distinguishes science from art, fact

from fiction or the real from the unreal, is not as clear, or as relevant any more. Anthropology, like history, is a discipline which has developed through the act or art of writing – writing about people, practices and events. It may be based on the taking down of objective observation, but it is in effect an art of observing and recounting, so telling a story, therefore bringing it closer to fiction. As Clifford writes,

> […] this ideology has crumbled. They [the articles in the book] see culture as composed of seriously contested codes and representations; they assume that the poetic and the political are inseparable, that science is in, not above, historical and linguistic processes. They assume that academic and literary genres interpenetrate and that the writing of cultural descriptions is properly experimental and ethical. Their focus on text making and rhetoric serves to highlight the constructed, artificial nature of cultural accounts. It undermines overly transparent modes of authority, and it draws attention to the historical predicament of ethnography, the fact that it is always caught up in invention, not in the representation, of cultures (Wagner 1975). (Clifford 1986: 2)

Ethnography, anthropology and historical writing, has, in Clifford's view, as in other theorists', an inventive, subjective and even artistic quality about it. It is even experimental, as any art form may be. In this sense, the line that separates scientific analysis from the artistic or the literary is dissolved and the two modes of acknowledging, interpreting the world are mixed, adding value to each other. Fiction and ethnography, anthropology, or history become similar processes which gain power and a voice through each other.

> Literary processes – metaphor, figuration, narrative – affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered, from the first jotted "observations," to the completed book, to the ways these configurations "make sense" in determined acts of reading.
>
> It has long been asserted that scientific anthropology is also an "art," that ethnographies have literary qualities. We often hear that an author writes with style, that certain descriptions are vivid or convincing (should not every accurate description be convincing?). A work is deemed evocative or artfully composed in addition to being factual; expressive, rhetorical functions are conceived as decorative merely as ways to present an objective analysis or descriptions more effectively. Thus the facts of the matter may be kept separate, at least in principle, from their means of communication. But the literary or rhetorical dimensions of ethnography can no longer be so easily compartmentalized. They are active at every level of cultural science. Indeed the very notion of a "literary" approach to a discipline, "anthropology," is seriously misleading. (Clifford 1986:4)

It is possible to apply anthropological theory to literature considering it as a practice similar to ethnography, or in other words to understand cultures, places, historical events, people and their customs through fiction. And not only through the fictional content, the plot, the story and the characters, but also through the narrative voice, the 'accent' as Chantal Zabus has termed it (Zabus 1996) and the metaphorical function of the writing.

Accepting the interweaving effect of literature with the cultural sciences is a recent phenomenon which gives us a new perspective on people, places, lives and how these may be represented. However, the writing of history, philosophy or scientific content through literary narratives is not a new phenomenon as I discussed in the first Chapter of this thesis. The writing of history in a literary style goes back to the Bible, both the *Old* and the *New Testament* and Homer's *Odyssey* as ancient examples of literary texts used to write the history of a people. There are also, to give an Indian examples, the oldest vestige of an Indo-European sacred text, the *Vedas* which describe Hindu laws and rituals are written in many different narrative styles including hymns, mantras, verse and prose. In the same way, there are scientists, such as Desmond Morris, renowned zoologist who writes best-seller like books on human and animal behaviour or American writer Bill Bryson who writes accessible and entertaining books on science, language and travel. So the mixing of fact and fiction is an ancient and common academic and literary practice[62].

History and science have been told through poetry, plays, and novels and also through factual writing, with a personal touch of the author. My focus, however is not on how history is accurately told through fictional narratives, but on the new dimension that fiction opens into understanding the human being as an individual with social, cultural, historical and emotional depth. In this sense, fiction and the narrative acquire a whole new science of creative representation. The scientific dimensions that I am talking about in this discussion are, for example, social or cultural anthropology, or even psychology, psychiatry (in the description and understanding of characters), philosophy, history (in the depiction and interpreting of events and socio-political circumstances) and semiotics and linguistics (in the interpretation of signs and signals in everyday life and communication). I am looking at cultural studies and cultural theory and how it works through literature, or fiction, and in turn,

[62] See Chapter 1"On historical constructions and the power of narratives".

how fiction represents cultural forms. All these aspects of scientific disciplines are present in fiction and literary writing. Fiction in its construction and representation of human relations, practices and interaction with spaces provides us with an equally accurate understanding of the world which is perceived in three parts – the representation, seen through the eyes of the author, the textual construction, which includes voice, style, and cultural metaphors, and the interpretation on the part of the reader. Through the interconnection of this three-dimensional process, which Clifford describes in the quote above, a cultural narrative is composed.

The act of writing about cultural forms involves choice about what is included and excluded and how it is described. Writing is always fiction just as truth is always subjective. What may be true for one person may not be true to another, as perspectives change and meanings will be embedded in the text and so subtly or and deliberately forced into a process of interpretation and reinterpretation.

> Their rhetoric empowers *and subverts* their message. Other essays reinforce the point by stressing that cultural fictions are based on systematic, and contestable, exclusions. These may involve silencing incongruent voices ("Two Crows Denies it!") or deploying a consistent manner of quoting, "speaking for," translating the reality of others. Purportedly irrelevant personal or historical circumstances will also be excluded (one cannot tell all). Moreover, the maker (but why only one?) of ethnographic texts cannot avoid expressive tropes, figures, and allegories that select and impose meaning as they translate it. In this view, more Nietzschean than realistic or hermeneutic, all constructed truths are made possible by powerful "lies" of exclusion and rhetoric. Even the best ethnographic texts – serious, true fictions – are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control. (Clifford 1986:7)

The novel, or fiction, works in a similar way. It constructs a story, and therefore a partial truth, or an idea. But the information is manipulated in every sense – from what is exposed to how it is exposed. The story that is constructed and told through the novel is one version of the truth, or better yet, a piece of the whole. The reader may read only this version and formulate an idea. The reader, may, on the other hand, read this version along with others and compose a network, piece together the different parts of the puzzle, forming a kaleidoscope, and seeing the truth from different angles, different levels, and different perspectives. Fiction also allows us to zoom in and out of characters and of the story,

witnessing the fictional reality from different perspectives. But once again, this is always the choice of the author and all the turning points, information gathered, information revealed and how it is told, is all part of the process. The author chooses what to include, highlight, and reveal in the narrative. The author also chooses how to present and represent the information. This whole process is a creative practice. The reader will then also use creative cognitive abilities to formulate an idea through interpreting the given information. So not only is the reader manipulated into the author's perspective, but then the information itself and the reconstruction of events in the reader's imagination is also a manipulation of the facts presented. This is true for history, for anthropology, for ethnographies as for literature. Their production and the production of meaning is a fictional process.

So the nature and function that ethnography and consequently social anthropology served as an account or depiction of humankind, the other, and their 'foreign' or exotic practices, has changed and evolved. To add to this, the needs and demands of the world as a social environment have also changed. The world and humans as social beings trying to make sense of themselves, their surroundings and practices are looking outward in an attempt to reconstruct themselves inwards, and vice versa. The constant flow and exchange of cultural information and practices inevitably mean the ongoing process of adapting to new realities through the reconstruction of cultural identity. And consequently, spatial realities and the way humans as socio-cultural entities relate to the physical construction of the world are also experiencing transformations as a way of adapting to identities in the making. Socio-cultural forms are no longer rigid structures that define human identity or how it is classified. Structures have become more flexible, just as boundaries and borders have shifted or blurred, and social categories have expanded to allow for a broader, more complete understanding of the world and its people and cultures. Historical writing has always played a fundamental role in the understanding of humankind through the depiction of people and events despite temporal distance. The further in time from which events are perceived, the closer to fiction their reconstruction becomes. Interpretation turns into a process of reading over and adding to previous interpretation, therefore, a creative reconstruction.

Furthermore, whereas in the past the writing of history was an endeavour for a select group, and history written about specific groups only, while others were forgotten or

marginalized, today it has become a generalized practice, available to most and accessible to almost all. Learning about another's story in today's world, is an option, a choice. Anyone can write history, including their own history; and history can be written about anyone, and even those who were denied a history are now given the possibility to become an 'official' part of history and to recover and re-write the missing parts of their nation's historical development. The attribution of a voice which is heard and acknowledged is made possible through the personal narratives which compose the broader cultural or national narratives. Here is where fiction, like other art forms, emerges as an important narrative voice in this process. Fiction moves closer to anthropology and history, and deconstructs the idea that documents of academic objectivity are the only reliable sources for an understanding of the world, as we witness the widespread popularity of 'native' or indigenous writers writing, or expressing themselves through all kinds of art, about their nation, culture and people, from a first-hand perspective.

> A new figure has entered the scene, the "indigenous ethnographer" (Fahim, ed. 1982; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). Insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding. Their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways. Their diverse post- and neo colonial rules for ethnographic practice do not necessarily encourage "better" cultural accounts. The criteria for judging a good account have never been settled and are changing. But what has emerged from all these ideological shifts, rule changes, and new compromises is the fact that a series of historical pressures have begun to reposition anthropology with respect to its "objects" of study. Anthropology no longer speaks with automatic authority for others defined as unable to speak for themselves ("primitive," "pre-literate," "without history"). (Clifford 1986:10)

A vast majority of the people who were once forgotten, silenced or misrepresented by history, are now able to speak for themselves, and even if in some cases they are still unable to fully formulate their own stories because they lack the means to do so, for social, economic or health reasons, there is someone who is able do it for them.[63]

[63] Documentaries play an important role in the world today, raising awareness for many issues from the earth, to the environment, to poverty, disease and overpopulation, among many others. Although there are still many parts of the world, even in affluent societies, where in some cases, large parts of the populations are illiterate or are ignorant of the importance of reading, writing and information, for their lives are structured towards survival,

In the 1997 edition of Granta, celebrating the 50th year anniversary of the independence of India, there is a text written by Viramma, "an agricultural worker and midwife" from Karani, a village near Pondicherry in South-East India. In this article she discusses her work, from her own personal and individual experience, as well as from her perspective of the role of the women as child-bearers and mothers in India. Childbirth to her, as to women from her village and former caste, was integrated within a ritualistic practice, whereby the focus was not only on the biological function being performed, but also on the belief system it was a part of. Evil spirits had to be warded off, impurities expelled from the mother's womb and the placenta buried for the sake of the child. These ritualistic practices shaped the natural working of the individual and community's health system. She describes how she performs the ritual of bearing a child:

> When I'm giving birth I first make a point of preparing a tray for Ettiyan – the god of death's assistant – and his huge men, with their thick moustaches and muscly shoulders. On the tray I put green mangoes, coconuts and other fruit as well as some tools: a hoe, a crowbar, a basket, so that they can set to work as soon as the child comes out of the sack in our womb. Yes! I've seen enough to know what I am talking about. I've had a bushel of children! Everything we eat goes into that sack: that's how the child grows. Just think what a mystery it is. With the blood he collects over ten months, Isvaran [the God Siva] moulds a baby in our womb. Only he can do that. Otherwise how could sperm become a child? (Viramma 1997: 188)

As can be understood from the above excerpt from her text, childbirth was not a purely biological function of nature but was integrated within a social, mythical and cultural system which imposed itself on the natural working of individual and social development. The belief system and the practice itself is narrated by the individual experiencing it. As she offers the reader her narrative, the practice is perceived through an insider's beliefs and experience and the story acquires a whole new historical, anthropological, religious and cultural dimension and meaning. An anthropologist will observe, analyse and document the practice and belief system which sustains it, but will interpret it according to prior scientific and pre-conceived beliefs. Though the anthropologist may try to be as objective as possible in his/her

there are activists, ethnographers, film makers, writers, scientists who will speak out for them and send their message to the rest of the world.

observations, they know how a baby is conceived and born, and what the mother's body may suffer with pregnancy and birth. The medical conception of pregnancy and childbirth, the health and scientific system in which the anthropologist (or any other observer of a biological function or social practice) has been integrated structures his/her thinking processes and will therefore interfere with a neutral observation and interpretation. This is not wrong. It is human. But who is to judge what system is correct or closer to the truth?

> A pregnant woman is prey to everything that roams around her: ghosts, ghouls, demons, the evil spirits of people who have committed suicide or died violent deaths. She has to be very careful if she is a Pariah. Pariah women have to go all over the place, grazing the cattle, collecting wood. We're outside the whole time, even when the sun is at its height. Those spirits take advantage of this: they grab us and possess us so we fall ill, or have miscarriages. Something like that happened when I was pregnant with my second child. (Viramma 1997: 190)

This local understanding of life is what anthropologist Marshall Sahlins would call 'mythical realities' or 'historical metaphors' (as discussed in the first chapter of my thesis). According to Sahlins, all [indigenous] peoples having their own belief system, will therefore also have their own rationality and structured system through which life and the world in all its forms and occurrences is made meaningful and understood.

The world is also defined according to local realities, expressed through a linguistic structure with a local meaning. For example, Viramma says of mothers: "Until they grow up, we mothers always have a fire in our belly for our children (…)" (Viramma 1997: 192) and "Isvaran has filled my womb." (Viramma 1997: 192). These are 'mythical realities' and 'cultural metaphors' which help structure the world within a system of thought as expressed through language according to beliefs, which are local realities.

This is a fundamental factor in fictional writing depicting the South East Asian experience of writers such as Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and others before them and other who came later. Roy and Desai as other postcolonial writers express local realities in a foreign voice, using the English language medium. Their narratives are translations of experience. But through the appropriation of the foreign form the local is recovered and reworked. There is an encounter between the external and the internal, the outsider and the insider, the foreign

and the local, the global and the regional in the production of cultural metaphors translated into mythical and literary realities. Characters, spaces, dialogue and events are created based on actual events, but redesigned through the imaginative power of fiction. The narrative is constructed as being a local reality, depicting local people as the characters, their families and relations, the social interaction of locals and the routines and practices performed by those integrated within a specific space at a given historical period. The experience therefore is not narrated from the objective eye of the anthropologist, or from the distant and ideological perspective of a historian, but experienced from an insider point of view. The language that will narrate the story, the metaphoric depiction of events will be done through a local language. This is a powerful tool as social realities are described and depicted through local metaphors and language, attributing them a language of their own and an identity which renders events, people and spaces that have never before been talked about, as authentic through fiction.

The text has repositioned itself as working practice within the daily, social, political and personal lives of characters because, if we stop for a minute to consider this, that's all we are, characters in a huge intertwined story. We make sense of everything around us through the narratives we construct based on our understanding the world. Lives and life are interconnected through fact and fiction and a fusion of both. A more human approach to cultural studies which developed in the past decades has brought the science of historical interpretation and anthropological theory down to an understanding of everyday life, people and events, recognizing these as constantly changing and shifting. And ultimately, as pointed out by Clifford, cultures "do not hold still for their portraits" (Clifford 1986: 10). Just as cultures are perceived differently from different angles, and the way they are exposed by the ethnographer, or by whoever is giving the account, will also differ and consequently alter the focus and the perception of people, practices and events, so no two portraits will ever be alike. And above all, cultures are not static. Cultures are an ongoing process, malleable and permeable, moved through time, fragile designs, easily erased, and re-written according to external and internal influences. As I have outlined in this paragraph there are far too many subjective factors involved for a factual account of people and events through any given medium to be possible, and to hold itself as authentic over time. The only possible account

taken for its truth or authenticity would be the one which comes from the insider perspective, telling their story. But again, how can it be true in the purest sense of the term, if it is subjective?

Fictional narratives besides opening up new doors of perception on social, cultural and historical realities, also expose the changes cultures have been subjected to through the form and content in which cultural forms are represented in the novels. Writers of fiction, especially those who have emerged from a postcolonial setting may therefore be understood as new historians, new sociologists, or new ethnographers who depict life, the world, people in all its forms and aspects through their narratives.

Novels, therefore, may be considered a new and alternative form of writing for the social sciences. Novels may be what Clifford calls 'new histories' where the past and present are intertwined in an ongoing social process which gains meaning through individual experience. Novels are also new ethnographies, though imaginative, they are (re)constructions of life and lives through fictional metaphors translated into social realities, or vice versa. With fiction, the reader is given access to new social and individual realities, as first-hand experience.

The novel or fictional text establishes a proximity to individual lives, exposing both inner and outer experience, public and private manifestations, through a narrative of thoughts, feelings, emotions and psychological nuances of characters. As readers we are allowed into individual perception, as well as into the lives of communities, showing how people in a given social or cultural setting live, their customs, traditions, interactions and daily practices. When depicting social and cultural realities, privileged access into how different groups organize their daily lives and create their social networks and values is also granted. As scholar and activist Baden Offord has claimed, cultural studies today is "a critical study of everyday life". Cultural studies not only provides the pillars for empirical thought but also questions empirical research as a structured form, allowing for a more personal form of research and questioning of how everyday life and individual practices may be interpreted, understood and represented. This is possible through the focus on the individual. Offord claims that cultural studies,

Approaches knowledge through self-reflexivity and empirical research, so the combination of being a reflective thinker as a scholar and what is the position of my knowledge and my activity of being a knowledge producer. How is that in relation to looking at research in field work and empirical research? I was very interested in questions of social justice and human rights and sexual Orientation, and cultural studies gave me the kind of tools, theoretically, practically, to be able to, in a sense, do my research, which I did in Indonesia and Singapore and in Australia for my PhD and I was able to, in a sense, get a really good idea of how empowering cultural studies really is as a kind of approach to scholarship. I loved the fact that it was interdisciplinary. I came at the questions that I had through history, political science, through cultural anthropology, through cultural geography and sexuality studies. So for me, cultural studies has probably the sharpest form of scholarship that I was aware of that provided me with that capacity to look very rigorously, very robustly into very difficult questions. (Offord 2014) [64]

Through the postcolonial narrative, such as *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* the local and the global are represented. The world is perceived through individual experience and interpretation. Historical and cultural realities are constructed and understood through the restructuring of thought processes, since these have shaped individual identity and how it is manifested. What I mean is for example, how a colonial past, an oppressive government, war, poverty, etc. have shaped someone, or a community, and how the novel form has been used to reveal this experience. The writer or scholar of culture and history is therefore not a distant, anonymous or 'invisible' observer, relying on visual, observable facts for an objective construction of practices and customs, and in consequence a theory on human behaviour through an understanding of a specific socio-cultural space. The writer, as a historian, as an anthropologist, as a scholar of human life in general is an activist struggling for individual meaning and identity through a re-working of all empirical and cognitive processes. Fiction has been a powerful tool in the unleashing of cultural realities through metaphor.

The ethnographer would traditionally integrate him/herself within the culture being observed, making him/herself unnoticed so as not to perturb the interaction and practice or the shaping and performance of events. And as according to Roland Barthes in "The Death of

[64] Transcribed from the interview available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3mW63lGxgI (accessed 10/05/2016). Baden Offord is an activist scholar, director and research professor at the Centre for Human Rights Education at Curtin University, Australia.

the Author" the ethnographer, as an author would be disconnected from the narrative being able to produce an account based on observation though freeing it of cultural perspective and interpretation (1968),

> As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. The sense of this phenomenon, however, has varied; in ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose 'performance' – the mastery of the narrative code – may possibly be admired, but never his 'genius'. (Barthes 1968: 155)

This invisibility is justified by Geertz, when he calls himself and his wife, also an anthropologist, 'professional intruders' (Clifford 1986:69) who were treated by the Balinese villagers as not being there[65]. Ethnographers were not involved in the daily life and practices of those they were observing and studying so as not to interfere with cultural purity. The ethnographer tried to remain anonymous and invisible in his/her observations and free of thought in the construction of the report, serving as a bridging between the cultural practices and the writing. Again in Barthes' words,

> In France, Mallarmé was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'. (Barthes 1968: 143)

But the truth of the matter is, they (Geertz and his wife) were there, and their presence had a meaning and impact on the Balinese villager's lives. Subjectivity, as Clifford points out, was conventionally 'blurred' by the ethnographer. But the ethnographer, in an attempt to objectively describe the Balinese tradition of the cock fight, or any other local practice or

[65] Here, James Clifford uses Clifford Geertz's ethnography of Balinese cockfighting "Deep Play: Notes on Balinese Cockfight" to support his ideas.

cultural trait, as done by ethnographers still today, is applying his/her own perspective to the situation. As Clifford points out the ethnographer, however, is not writing his/her thoughts and observations thinking they are going to be read by the people he is writing about, but rather, end objective is the reader on the other side of the world. So the ethnographer writes from no other perception but that of the anthropologist, or at least tries to be as distant and objective as possible. There is a general aim to portray events, practices and cultures as theatrical pieces, focusing on interpretive means for their understanding. The anthropologist places him or herself between the object of study and the readers for academic purposes, assuming a position of power and control over both. Words may be tailored to induce whatever the ethnographer feels and experiences, and wants the reader to feel for the purpose of his academic endeavour.

With the emergence of the postcolonial novel, the role of the anthropologist as a voice of authority has shifted, as have power relations. The ethnographer is a vehicle through which cultural practices are portrayed. The writer as ethnographer places him/herself at the heart of the story, speaking through characters and through the denial of any form of objectivity by allowing for neverending possibilities of recreating a story.

> Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually – as objects, theatres, texts – it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than a visual paradigm, the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye and toward expressive speech (and gesture). The writer's "voice" pervades and situates the analysis, and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced. (Clifford 1986:12)

In conventional anthropology the ethnographer as an outsider applies a Western reading to a practice that is foreign to him/her. Metaphors, meanings and interpretations are applied, where these, perhaps, have no place or value whatsoever. It is a purely Western academic practice. Or perhaps, it is an exercise of fiction. As Clifford states of Geertz in his description of the Balinese cockfight:

> Despite his phenomenological-hermeneutical pretensions, there is in fact in "Deep Play" no understanding of the native from the native's point of view. There is only the constructed understanding of the constructed native's

constructed point of view. Geertz offers no specifiable evidence for his attributions of intention, his assertions of subjectivity, his declarations of experience. His constructions of constructions of constructions appear to be little more than projections, or at least blurrings, of his point of view, his subjectivity, with that of the native, or, more accurately, of the constructed native. (Clifford 1986: 74)

The ethnography is a construction, a fictional narrative, a mythical reality, a social metaphor. Writers, authors, in a sense play a similar role to anthropologists as they portray lives and social realities through their narratives, but rather than being distant observers, who besides describing, or portraying a particular practice they assume to be taking place for a constructed reason, they also tend to simplify; offer a re-creation or representation of a particular practice or people. Writers of fiction have culture work through the narrative crossing all forms of possible representation in the novel. For postcolonial writers, culture and changing cultural forms are embedded in their narratives. Narratives simulate spaces, cultural spaces where everyday lives and interactions take place. In fiction, the narrative is the space where practices and interactions gain form and are given life. Whereas, traditional anthropology turned practices into a staged not natural, performance, in fiction, the narrative creates a stage where characters bring to life their inner and outer worlds. Characters play out these worlds and act through them using the text as their vehicle. The narrative is a metaphor for an unfolding world where culture and history seize the text, adapted to a narrative reality that serves a purpose for the author and for the reader and critic. And truth regains its power, as subjectivity, inner perception, authentic voices and creative exposure gain a voice in the narrative.

An important point to keep in mind in my argument is that the ethnographer, despite being enmeshed in whatever and whoever he/she is writing about and inseparable from his/her own subjectivity, is nevertheless attempting a representation of a world and its practices, rather than recreating it, and reconstructing it as a reality through the narrative. The writer of fiction, on the other hand is transporting the world onto the narrative and moving in and out of experience, applying different angles of perception, and opening up new doors for understanding the past, present and future of a given group of people in any given place. Though both writing an ethnography and writing fiction involve creativity, they are different processes. One comprises of analytical creativity, while the latter creatively presents

information which may then be used for analysis. Subjectivity is a part of both processes and present in both writings, and is a focal point of departure in narrative representations whether through fiction, history or anthropology and, according to my thesis, not an obstacle to the construction of truth and in the value of representation.

Fictional narratives, despite not being (traditionally) of scientific nature in their core intention, provide us with relevant facts and data on people and cultures. Portraits and descriptions of people, lives, social habits, language, and other cultural factors in fiction, are helpful in the uncovering and understanding of socio-cultural practices, linguistic patterns and in the depiction of tradition, identity and liminality. Fiction is also a powerful and useful tool in the raising of social awareness for previously unspoken for groups excluded because of their gender, class, skin colour, sexuality, or in the case of India, caste.

Postcolonial fiction takes this a step further. In this type of literature, the distance between the anthropologist, historian or ethnographer and the people as objects of study is diminished, or actually eliminated. The writer is no longer establishing an interpretive link between the familiar and the unfamiliar, through rhetoric, metaphors and interpretation, based on Western standards, of signs and symbols. The writer is in some way a part of the culture he/she is writing about or re-appropriating the culture and its people through the narrative. The writer is able to speak through the characters, intentionally, or attribute authentic traits to the characters in the story. Moreover, the story itself becomes a re-piecing of history through the inclusion of previously missing parts. There is, therefore, a certain bottom-up authority in the role of the postcolonial writer, an idea I have previously mentioned in this thesis, for he/she has inside information and contact with the people, places and culture being written about. He/she is in fact somewhat embedded in the culture being written about. The relation of knowledge and power has shifted here. It is no longer the idea of Western power over others because of preconceived notions of knowledge as academic achievement, where the dominant culture was able to judge, define and classify, the 'other', the 'foreign', the 'primitive', 'native' or 'indigenous' culture, but the idea that power or authority, rather, is based on ground, authentic, hands-on knowledge. The voice and experience of the indigenous, of the individual (in my argument), the personal narrative, the small details of someone's experience, the everyday life, the forgotten stories, the reconstruction of events as told from

a different and new perspective; all these are fundamental factors in the writing and understanding of the world, its development and its historical, social and political processes. Furthermore, these voices which emerge expose and are symbols of the changes which have shaped and which attribute meaning to the world as we acknowledge it today.

This shifting of power relations is also a result of the way in which information is gathered. The postcolonial writer is born out of the culture being portrayed in the narrative, it is his/her 'ego-histoire'[66] his/her fictional 'ethnography' and culturally valid autobiographical narrative which is used in the understanding of the nation, a culture, a society and people. There is no dividing line, no bridging between two worlds, and no cultural hierarchy involved in the narrative depiction. Nor is there an interpretation, a reading for academic purposes. The purpose of this narrative goes beyond the academic endeavour of understanding social structure to a deeper quest for a new version of the truth, for a purity in the understanding of a culture that has been misrepresented for not being represented as a whole and throughout time, or even ignored.

This type of account of people, practices, societies and cultures, told through the fictional narrative is important in the sense that it deconstructs the idea of the native as an object of scientific observation, a lab rat used for the purpose of understanding general theories of the science of human behaviour. The so called 'native' is in fact a human being, a protagonist in his/her own story, which is just as relevant for the understanding of the nation and the world, as any other; both contributing to the construction of a personal, individual history or representing one of the pieces that composes the collective story of the people to which he/she belongs.

James Clifford makes an interesting claim in his chapter "On Ethnographic Allegory" when he says, "Living does not easily organize itself into a continuous narrative." (Clifford 1986:106) and seems to unintentionally draw a link to Roy and Desai's narratives. The non-linear depiction of events in these novels follow along this idea. Ethnographies, as Clifford states, when surrendering to the strategies applied in fiction move closer to cultural allegories as opposed to objective scientific reports. This means that what is being portrayed in the ethnographies, or in the writing, is a metaphor of life, open for interpretation, but ironically,

[66] A historical and cognitive reflection through an autobiographical exercise.

in the case of fiction, a real metaphor, stemming from authentic representations and written by someone who is in touch with what is being represented, with the people, events and practices being depicted. “Ethnographic writing is allegorical at the level both of its content (what it says about cultures and their histories) and of its form (what is implied by its mode of textualization.)” (Clifford 1986:98). Through the narrative construction, a gateway into another world is opened, a passage that is encoded in fictional, subjective form, but once inserted within that world, we, as readers, are awakened to a distant, yet closer understanding of how much alike we are in essence, only distinguished through cultural nuances. As Clifford states, “The story’s unfolding requires us, first, to imagine a different *cultural* norm (…) and then to recognize a common *human* experience (…).” (Clifford 1986:99)

Unlike the traditional form of ethnographic writing, in fiction the narrative is open to interpretation. As readers and critics, we are invited to construct an understanding of another culture and people through a reading of their daily, most mundane practices and interactions. While doing so, we as Western (or foreign) readers can only relate to the most intimate and basic of feelings, reactions, thoughts and behaviours that characters share through the novel. Furthermore, we are also given the opportunity to understand grander events through local, intimate experience. This train of thought coincides with the overturn of power relations during decolonization, and with the crumbling of structures that defined what was socially acceptable, historically valid and politically correct. In the same way that writing by feminists, homosexuals, second or third generations immigrants, war veterans, and many other voices that had previously not spoken out for themselves, began to appear in English fiction. Through this kind of revealing fiction about human nature, “A commonality is produced that, by bringing separate lives together, empowers personal action, recognizes a common state.” (Clifford 1986:107).

What is interesting in this new form of narrative that emerges following the Second World War, a period marked by the end of many dictatorships in Europe, decolonization, massive social change, and migration, is that, although I have called it new, the people, practices and perspectives being written about are not new, nor have they recently emerged. These narratives represent a shifting of relations and of ideologies, and this is why they emerge when they do, because there is a common consciousness, both on the part of the

subjects, as also on the part of the world that is open to these changing forms. And even though resistance is still strong today at many levels, and concerning many socio-cultural shifts which emerged decades ago, these new forms have challenged traditional structures and have worked their way into society and mainstream acceptance and acknowledgement[67].

My discussion stems towards the argument that postcolonial fiction presents itself through the same principles as ethnographies, and consciously or not, serves the same objective, but through a more open, deeper and more generally encompassing form through the depiction of the specific. This idea of the mixing of anthropology and fiction and the authority this narrative voice acquires is once again referred to in Clifford's discourse, "Ethnographies often present themselves as fictions of learning, the acquisition of knowledge, and finally the authority to understand and represent another culture." (Clifford 1986:108)

Postcolonial Indian literature in English and its readers position its authors as ethnographers of their own culture who in fictional liberty find the necessary tools to creatively reconstruct cultural scenarios and provide knowledge of 'another' culture and people. Through their inner knowledge, contact and representation of culture, these writers acquire a voice of authority in the literary, socio-cultural, linguistic, historical and political spheres. James Clifford, as other anthropologist who have contributed to his book *Writing Culture*, call this type of narrative, an "evocation". I have used this term already in my thesis, but it is in this chapter and in the conclusion that this aspect of my argument develops. So in most of the thesis so far I have referred to the theoretical function of the postcolonial narrative as a representation, a recreation, a portrayal or even a depiction of events, people and circumstances.

So although the writer of fiction is not, in an empirical sense, an ethnographer, he/she has contributed towards the changes that occurred in traditional ethnographies and anthropology. Fiction has gained ground in the field of the social sciences and cultural studies, just as ethnographies and histories have come to adopt more literary profiles. In the social sciences cultures are portrayed and analysed, whereas in postcolonial fiction which is

[67] Here I am referring to changes brought about in sexuality, gender roles, racial differences, and economic differences which though having been around for a long time, in many societies or strands of society, are still not completely recognized or accepted.

generally linked with a national history these same cultures are also portrayed and analysed but through individual stories and experience. These bits of information compose and tell the bigger cultural and historical story. Postcolonial, like other contemporary literature of that depicts cultural changes, migration, historical realities and social experience in 20th and 21st societies around the world has added value, depth and broadened knowledge on different cultures and their underlying social branching and networks.

> The new tendency to name and quote informants more fully and to introduce personal elements into the text is altering ethnography's discursive strategy and mode of authority. Much of our knowledge about other cultures must now be seen as contingent, the problematic outcome of intersubjective dialogue, translation, and projection. This poses fundamental problems for any science that moves predominantly from the particular to the general, that can make use of personal truths only as examples of typical phenomena or as exceptions to the collective patterns. (Clifford 1986:109)

Roy's and Desai's novel are examples of this theory that I have been developing in this first part of my third chapter which I here conclude. I am now going to move onto an analysis of how characters, space, time and the narrative are all fundamental anthropological metaphors in the understanding of Indian culture.

The novels as the site for field work

To start with the titles of the novels, first, *The God of Small Things* the idea that stories in life are composed of all the little pieces that most of the time we never know about is implied, while in *The Inheritance of Loss* there seems to be a suggestion of the need to appropriate a lost, forgotten or unknown past. These are two aspects of the historical and anthropological dimension I have been working into my discussion.

When events in *The Inheritance of Loss* are rearranged chronologically, we understand in the story that Sai, a third generation Indian girl has recently arrived at Cho Oyu, her grandfather's the house in Kalimpong. Her grandfather, Jemubhai Patel, an embittered

retired judge, is a man whose story she will learn, and through her discovery, we as readers also become familiar with his past and how he came to be the man he is. She is an orphaned child who has never lived in India, and who spent much of her childhood at boarding schools. As she entered Kalimpong, saw the river, and the mountains, Sai "became aware of the enormous space she was entering." (Desai 2006:31). This, as I read it, is a metaphor of space as not only physical or geographical space, but a historical, social and cultural space. A space which had and still has so much to be written about. Sai was experiencing it for the first time and she was confronted with the empty space of her narrative of Indian identity.

According to Margaret Mead (1970) there are three types of culture: postfigurative, cofigurative and prefigurative. In postfigurative cultures, children and grandchildren acquire cultural habits and practices from their forebearers. This usually occurs in smaller, or more archaic communities where families stay within close proximity of each other. In cofigurative cultures, practices and customs are passed and shared from peers, acquaintances, in social environments, and not so much from family lineage. This tends to occur in an urban or diasporic environment, where it is necessary to adapt to new social circumstances. In prefigurative cultures, which possibly defines the technological era we are now living, it is adults who learn from their children, or rather, older generations from younger generations. Mead's three classifications of culture can all be identified in Roy's and Desai's novels in the different generations of characters and the relationships and exchanges between them.

In *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, characters occupy a narrative space where events have been piled onto each other and from which they find no escape. The narratives jump back and forth reconstructing the sequence of events through fragments, like Rushdie's image of the cracked lens as mentioned in "Imaginary Homelands". In this essay, Rushdie also refers to the image of the edifice as the place where meaning is constructed. We build our identities like we build a house, or accumulate into a house. As he returns to Bombay, he decides to visit his family home, now occupied by new owners. He does not attempt to go in because he wants to preserve the memory he has of the house as it was, untouched by what the new residents have done to it. The black and white photograph of the house he has on the wall of his study, and the fragments of memories he has of living in this house are fundamental pieces in his search for an identity and a sense of belonging, and in the

understanding of his personal narrative and reconstruction of his history, as an essential piece in the construction of his nation's history. The construction of an identity, however, implies a creative process, since the past, as meaningful and real as we want it to seem in the present is but an illusion. And through reconstructing moments and events, and piecing these together, personal narratives move closer to fictional versions of the truth.

Sai realizes that not having lived in India and having been educated at boarding schools, and knowing very little about her family, or her origins, her knowledge of her own nation, its history and culture was, not only fragmented, but inconsistent. In the same way, any coherence she has acquired, or attempted to construct of herself in the present is shaken when confronted with another perspective of her identity:

> Any sense that Sai was taught had fallen between the contradictions, and the contradictions themselves had to be absorbed. "Lochinvar" and Tagor, economics and moral science, highland fling in tartan and Punjabi harvest dance in dhotis, national anthem in Bengali and an impenetrable Latin motto emblazoned on banderoles across their blazer pockets and also on an arch over the entrance. Pisci tischi episculum basculum. Something of the sort. (Desai 2006:30)

She begins to engage in a hybrid reformulation of her identity.

Her grandfather Judge Jemubhai Patel, is a man whose history weighs upon him, who as a young boy had moved to Cambridge to study, and rejected his Indian cultural upbringing. As he reflects on his past throughout the narrative, the reader is given insight into what he is feeling as he too engages in a process of redefining himself, re-interpreting his past and attempting to understand his identity. The arrival of his granddaughter causes an inner conflict as he tries to deal with his past, his history and reconstruct his story. This is his narrative, just as Sai's search for an understanding of her place in the world, is hers. And like them all the characters in the novel are themselves open histories of individual stories. These individual narratives are the pieces that together help to compose the larger story.

The judge is old, caught in a web of memories and haunted by his past. "Like other elderly people, he seemed not to have travelled forward in time but far back. Harking to the prehistoric, in attendance upon infinity, he resembled a creature of the Galápagos staring over the ocean." (Desai 2006:33). It is through him, as through other characters as they structure

their lives that a culture and history is put together and the past and present are reconstructed through the 'little' individual ethnographies, through the 'inheritance' of discovered details, returning to the metaphors in the titles.

The ideas discussed in the previous paragraph tie in with earlier discussions in this thesis on the reconstruction of history. Once again, the writing of history, just as the writing of ethnographies may be considered a merely subjective exercise. Historical perspectives change over time, according to ideology and to the mind and vision of the historian, and ethnographies too have changed form over time, and according to theoretical structures that defined them, as well as according to the eye of the ethnographer and his intentionality. In the same way, we as individuals are also invited to delve into our lives, our memories and reconstruct our own histories, interpreting them according to present circumstances. "The judge picked up a book and tried to read, but he couldn't. He realized, to his surprise, that he was thinking of his own journeys, of his own arrivals and departures, from places far in his past. (…) Many years had passed, and yet the day returned to him vividly, cruelly." (Desai 2006:35). And once again, as he delves into and reconstructs his past, the image of space re-appears, and is shaped by an interpretation of his memories, "the immensity of the landscape within which Jemu had unknowingly lived impressing itself upon him." (Desai 2006:36).

The cook is an interesting character in the story. Through him stories are recreated within the story. He is a creative producer of his own story through the deliberate manipulating of his son Biju's, who has moved to the United States in search of work, and of the judge's, his employer of whom he felt embarrassment. In his reconstruction and adaptation of these other two character's stories, he recreates himself and his identity. His ancestors, he claims, had all worked for white men, and here he was, working for an Indian, the judge. He knew his neighbours mocked him for they received proper treatment from their employers, but not him.

> So serious was this rivalry that the cook found himself telling lies. Mostly about his past since the present could too easily be picked apart. He fanned a rumour of the judge's lost glory, and therefore of his own, so it flamed and prospered up and down the market. A great statesmen, he told them, a wealthy landowner who gave his family property away, a freedom fighter who left a position of immense power in court as he did not wish to pass judgement on his fellow men – he could not, not with his brand of patriotic zest, jail

congresswallahs, or stamp out demonstrations. A man so inspiring but brought to his knees, to austerity and philosophy, by sorrow at his wife's death, the wife herself a martyred and religious mother of a kind that makes a Hindu weak in the knees. "That is why he sits by himself all day and everyday."

The cook had never known the judge's wife, but he claimed that his information had been handed down from the older servants in the house-hold, and eventually, he had grown to believe his own marvellous story. (Desai 2006:56)

This passage helps us to understand how the writer of the story, in this case, a story in the oral tradition, though the same theory applies for the writing of history and ethnographies, is responsible for the twists and turns, and the shape it takes. It is also the writer of the story that is responsible for the spreading of information or knowledge on any given person or sequence of events.

Were it not for the cook, then no one, not Sai, not the neighbouring servants, nor we readers would ever have learned about the judge's life. The fact that the information he gives is lacking in factual truth, it is his interpretation of events and recreation of characters, the cook's ability to fictionalize that results in character construction. Through the cook and his stories Sai's interest in discovering more about her grandfather, her family, her past increases. But, "the sound of the cook talking reached the judge's ears as he sat over chess in the drawing room. When he thought of his past, he began, mysteriously, to itch. Every bit of him filled with a burning sensation. It roiled within until he could barely stand it." (Desai 2006:56) The judge himself is thrown into a journey, a revisiting of his self, his past, his life, contrasting it with the cook's version. He becomes aware that there is not one version of the past, and of the truth, but different approaches and the possibility of multiple interpretations. We as readers are here provided with two perspectives of the story: a personal interpretation, as the judge looks back in time, with a sense of guilt over his choices, and the cook's deliberately manipulated truth used to serve his own purpose, and to flame up his own reputation. We as readers will then formulate another reading and interpretation through our own cognitive processes, through our own experience and through our own reconstruction of the facts.

This creative exercise, of the judge revisiting his past, and reinterpreting events, and redefining himself in the present and the cook reconstructing his story, history, and identity highlights the notion of the personal narrative as a fundamental piece in the construction of a

national and cultural history through the process of fictional representation. The narrative can be understood as a space. Spaces are where relationships are created and gain meaning, where social beings interact and make or try to make sense of their lives, society and the world around them and the narrative, like the past and the present, is also a space. The past is an unattainable space. It is there, lost somewhere in time, but it is through understanding it in the present that lives, meanings and identities are shaped.

> "Time passes, things change," said the judge, feeling claustrophobia and embarrassment.
>
> "But what is in the past remains unchanged, doesn't it?"
>
> "I think it does change. The present changes the past. Looking back you do not find what you left behind (…)" (Desai 2006: 208)

It is through the rewriting of the past that narratives gain meaning in cultural studies as they add missing parts to the story, or reinterpretations of earlier versions of the events. And in the process of this re-writing, the experience of 'others' of those who have not had a say, those whose existence was considered too irrelevant to history writing, becomes meaningful. "Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story." (Roy 1997:33) Theorists, scholars, readers in general begin to crave new stories, new interpretations that will contribute to a fuller understanding of history and culture of a nation such as India.

According to Foucault, our existence follows along a continuum, and that's how we make sense of history and the passing of time. But the memories and information gathered over years are what provides meaning to our existence. Likewise, in spaces such as houses, churches, museums, layers of history are piled onto each other, gaining meaning through their simultaneity and when perceived as a whole in present time, or by replacing or adding onto each other, but nevertheless coexisting. In his essay "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias", Foucault writes, "We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long line developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein." (Foucault 1984:1) Spaces, all spaces are piled with information, which has been added, layer upon layer over the years, just as our bodies and

our minds are too. We construct meaning, not so much from understanding our histories as a simple passing of time, leaving things behind and moving on, but as the complex beings that we are, we shape our existence by adding on information, even if fragmented, hoping to somehow better understand and define our identities. This however is an ongoing and many times frustrating process.

The narratives I am discussing are representations of this idea of a piling or layering of information, understanding experience as a simultaneous network of cognitive reconstruction. The non-linear narrative represents a constant return, as in Mircea Eliade's *Myth of Eternal Return* (1949)[68] with the analysis of 'archaic' societies who connect with the universe and time through a cyclical return to myth. In the same way we as readers keep returning to what is meaningful and revisiting it through a contemporary reinterpretation, 'forcing' upon ourselves the possibility for new perspectives.

In the same way, characters in the novels keep returning to moments in the past, as abstract spaces of memory, and to physical spaces as well. In both novels the return home is an underlying theme. In the opening paragraphs of *The God of Small Things* we read, "It was raining when Rahel came back to Ayemenem." (1), to the "old house on the hill" (20) the Ayemenem house and her brother Estha had also returned at some earlier point. In *The Inheritance of Loss* Sai, though she doesn't 'return' moves in with her grandfather, following her parents' death. But he, himself, the judge had returned to India, to Kalimpong after having lived in England and so had Baby Kochamma, Estha and Rahel's great aunt who, in her youth had also returned to her father's house and still lived there today. Ammu, the twin's mother, following the break-up of her marriage had also returned to the house, and finally, in *The Inheritance of Loss* Biju, the cook's son also returns to Cho Oyu following his experience as a migrant in the United States.

In literature of the diaspora, or in the representation of diasporic subjects and their experiences in diasporic contexts in postcolonial fiction in general, such as the case of Biju, the cook's soon in *The Inheritance of Loss,* cultural forms and their shifting processes are depicted. According to James Clifford in his essay "Diasporas" the South Asian diaspora, like

[68] First published in English in 1954.

other former British colonies is not so much about returning to the homeland, but about recreating the homeland abroad, "Similarly, the South Asian diaspora – which as Amitav Ghosh has argued (1989), is oriented not so much to roots in a specific place and a desire for return as around an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations – falls outside the strict definition" (Clifford 1997: 249). To the idea of recreating cultures and the phenomenon of shifting social and cultural forms, of the passing from one state of being is applied the anthropological term of liminality as discussed in the 2nd chapter of this thesis. This procedure which Bhabha discusses in his theories is witnessed in the literature of migrant groups, or of people who are in a transitional process of moving and adapting to another culture but nevertheless maintain connection with their own culture. Diasporic individuals and communities are involved in a process of cultural transformation, redefining their identities by leaving behind some things and assimilating others. This process, as Indian scholar Marakand Paranjape has analysed, involves location and relocation, and the experiencing of dislocation. It is in this dislocation that the diasporic subject defines or rather, re-defines the homeland as part of the process of defining him/herself. And it is in this process that Marakand makes an interesting claim – is it the homeland that makes the diaspora, or the diaspora that makes the homeland? In the same way that I have been arguing: is it history that makes the individual or is it the individual that writes his history?

Looking into diasporic literature and the representation of the diaspora through postcolonial fiction, South Asian writers have greatly contributed to an understanding of important aspects of contemporary cultural realities by depicting lives of families and communities in the diaspora, such as the short stories and novels by American Indian writer, Jhumpa Lahiri. These writers do in fact still contribute to the changing nature of cultures today because, as I have previously mentioned, culture is an ongoing process and their narratives are a sign of changing cultural forms. In their depiction of social and cultural transformations, they, the writers themselves, become a vehicle through which these transformations manifest themselves. But returning to Marakand's academic paper "Interrogating Diasporic Creativity: The Patan Initiative: A Valedictory Address" (2004) in it he questions the nature of the diaspora when represented in various forms, including fiction. Would diasporic literature be limited to narratives that describe the experience of migrants

and their lives in the hostland; and where would these writers have to be writing from – the homeland or from the diaspora? Another interesting point he raises is whether diasporic writers, such as Jhumpa Lahiri, or Vikram Seth who have settled in a new country, or are even second generation South Asians in the diaspora, do these writers have to write about themes of the diaspora, or would a novel about a totally different context, such as sexuality, or a crime novel, for example, still be considered a diasporic novel? These are very interesting and relevant points, which I have touched on in my second chapter, and they emphasize the fact that changing forms in the postcolonial cultural context are represented through not only content, but also through structure or the challenging of former structures, boundaries and defining lines. This is true also of the fact that postcolonial literature is now challenging its previous form through a reinvention of itself. The reinvention and transformations of identity, however, are nonetheless interminably connected to an eternal consciousness of self. We are individuals but we are also social beings. Our perceptions involve cognitive processes but are also culturally constructed. Identity, therefore, no matter how detached it may seem from any location, is always connected to some form of cultural and historical process.

Cultures are not scientific "objects" (assuming such things exist, even in the natural sciences) which are fixed in time and which fit into neat unchanging and timeless categories. Culture(s), and how we perceive it, is produced historically, and is actively contested at any given moment and contextual space. The picture is never completed since the perception and filling of a gap immediately leads to the awareness of other gaps and the awareness that we live in an era where everything is somehow connected, where borders have been crossed, and the boundaries that defined the world are not so clear anymore. So a full understanding of the diaspora is caught up in thorough debate and research.

Returning to the discussion on the diaspora, it may also be relevant to consider the writer's experience and how it is represented in the novel. Once again, it is personal experience and the individual narrative that dictate form and approach. Lahiri is a diasporic writer so her perception is of immigrant Indians in the United States. In the same way, a writer such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian writer who moved to the United States to study at University. In her writing she depicts the experience of, in particular, young Nigerian immigrants in the United States. She also writes from the position of the black subject

experiencing racism in the United States. In Nigerian politics of ethnicity she is Igbo and so reconstructs her story and the history of her homeland through her personal, social and ethnic Igbo perspective. This is her narrative and so becomes her cultural reality. Roy is a writer from the homeland, or at least 'returned' and Desai a second generation diasporic writer. Their understanding of both diaspora and the homeland is constructed on their personal experience of either as a result of the social, cultural and political structures that shaped them.

The diasporic narrative depicts worlds and cultural realities which are never without some form of personal experience. They are not empty constructions based purely on the imagination. These stories are the result of cultural knowledge, historical, political and social heritage as well as the articulation of the formal structures that shape narrative identities such as language, geography, economic factors and social realities such as the experience of family, class, religion and migration. These fictional worlds are based on the author's experience, as well as on the reconstruction of the identity and experience attributed to characters created through fragments and meanings that give shape to narrative structures as cultural metaphors (*Midnight's Children* is a very good example of this). Diasporic narratives are designed according to observation and experience, defined through political (sometimes also academic) discourse, and structured through the aid of facts and social practices among other external input which compose the skeleton of a story. Being works of fiction, however the power of the imaginary cannot be disregarded. Through the interworking of the imagination with experience and identity everything and anything can be re-created.

In diasporic narratives, however, the construction of character profiles and the relations between characters, plot and narrative rely also on essential internal cognitive and emotional processes such as memory and nostalgia which may have both a collective or individual dimension. The ingredients that compose diasporic narratives are the emotional factors at play in both the understanding of self and others, the creative imagination able to reconstruct fact and fiction into meaningful sketches of everyday life, the subjectivity of the individual author, expressed through the characters and their view of the world and the perception required to reconstruct experience aesthetically through the text. It is through this intertwining of factors that the narrative is transformed into the virtual space where social practices and individual experience tell a meaningful story. When the collective experience,

the cultural belonging, the redesigning of nation and a national history is acknowledged in the narrative, a metanarrative is produced, described as a 'national allegory'[69] by Frederic Jameson.

In narratives of the diaspora, or in postcolonial narratives where diasporic subjects are depicted, the homeland, and what it represents: tradition, family, home, or a nostalgia for a sense of belonging is emphasized. This ideal of the homeland is a reconstruction in the host land achieved through a re-identification with those characteristics, practices and customs, which provide the sense of belonging within a new context. Even when home was not the ideal place because of many factors, from social to political, economic, or because of conflict, the idea of home when viewed from a distance always carries with it this sense of nostalgia that only the diasporic subject will recognize and describe through a cultural memory and through the inheritance of remembering. As Femke Stock discusses in her essay in the collection of essays *Diasporas Concepts, Intersection, Identities* (2010)

> At the core of the concept of diaspora lies the image of the remembered home that stands at a distance both temporally and spatially. This 'place of origin' may be the focus of a sustained 'ideology of return' (Brah 1996: 180); it can still figure as a home in the present or be seen as belonging entirely to the past. It may have been left recently or generations ago; it may not exist any more or be the destination of regular 'home trips'; it may be a locus of nostalgia and nightmares; it may feel welcoming or strange upon return visits or it may never have been that homey in the first place. Somehow, though, it is imagined, recreated, longed for, remembered in the present through the diasporic imaginary (Anthias 1998: 577; Baumann 2000: 327; Clifford 1994: 310)
>
> Now what significance does such a remembered home have for the lived experience of diaspora? Memories of home are no factual reproductions of a fixed past. Rather they are fluid reconstructions set against the backdrop of the remembering subject's positionings and conceptualizations of social ascriptions and contestations of home. (Stock 2010: 24)

Meaning is reconstructed through the act of writing stories, through the personal narrative which allows readers into character's lives. The narrative provides the space for the fictional construction of the concept of home, or of the idea of the nation, or even for personal experience. The narrative is mixed up in a process of contextualizing the past and the distance

[69] Frederic Jameson (1986) "Third World Literature in the Age of MultiNational Capitalism" *Social Text* 15 65-68.

in the light of the present and of the immediate physical and spatial reality. “The act of remembering is always contextual, a continuous process of recalling, interpreting and reconstructing the past in terms of the present and in the light of an anticipated future.” (Stock 2010: 24) The re-creation of home is built around an abstract reality and in the narrative becomes a metaphor for broader concepts.

It is not only the experience of home which is common to the diasporic subject, but also that of homelessness. It is felt by those who have moved away from their homeland and who find themselves in a new and foreign environment, by those who seem to belong nowhere in particular, or are caught between two worlds, such as second generation immigrants. The idea of home is also constructed by those who have never experienced the homeland as home, but still they feel a sense of belonging, and share a collective memory of the land left behind by either their parents or grandparents. In any of these cases, the homeland will always be a symbolic space, a recreated space through the act of remembering.

> Later generations have not experienced migration and have no memories of the time before it (Brah 1996: 194). They are heirs to the diasporic memories that are told and retold, reappropriated and reinterpreted in the light of the here and now. Throughout their lives they construct their own diasporic narratives of home and belonging out of these memories, together with their own experiences, their ‘migration routes and migration roots’ (Kuah-Pearce and Davidson 2008: 2). Often, for descendants of migrants the question “Where do I belong?” is more pressing, and the meanings they give to home are more complex (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 217) (Stock 2010: 27)

The idea of (the) home and belonging for diasporic subjects and in literature of the diaspora is a complex issue because it is not constructed through a straightforward remembering and nostalgia for a home left behind. The idea of [the] home, has a spatio-temporal dimension which is reworked through fiction, is subjective in its perspective and of individual meaning. However, it is also adapted from a theoretical and ideological construction: Indian culture is as such, Indians in the homeland behave in such a way, and Indians in the diaspora behave in another way. Authors use fiction to work around these ideas in a creative way, by either integrating the cultural stereotype into their narrative, or by reacting against it. Furthermore, the idea of home is not only understood and represented

through the physical home, or the nation, but home can branch out in many symbolic ways such as through themes dealing with body, landscape, language and memory.

> The point of departure in this contribution was the centrality of the remembered home in conceptions of the diaspora. We can now conclude that home is a 'subtext' of diaspora' (Brah 1996: 190) in a far broader sense. From this cursory reflection, the concept of home emerges as a highly contextual and ambivalent notion, referring to multiple places and spaces in past, present and future in various ways. Home can be remembered, lived, longed for. Notions of home are fluid and bound to change as one moves in time and space. Rather than referring to one single home, in diasporic settings feelings of belonging can be directed towards both multiple physical spaces and remembered, imagined and/or symbolic spaces. (Al-Ali and Koser 2002: 8; Salih 2003: 70). At each moment in time, various home spaces may compete, collide or complement each other. (Stock 2010: 27)

The construction of the idea of home and defining of home for diasporic subjects, even in an attempt at an anthropology of home will irremediably always be mixed up in the creative powers of fiction. Home, defining it, and understanding it is a complex matter which fuses questions of identity, belonging, anthropology, ethnicity, history and fiction. All these factors give shape to the narrative of home. Through the interaction of all these forms of constructing the idea of home, an abstract concept is defined which gives meaning and makes sense to whoever creates it and identifies with it. To others who have no relation whatsoever to this particular concept of home, it becomes a reference, a point of departure for understanding. "It is the creative tension between the emic notion of 'home is where the heart is and the openness and layeredness of home as an analytical concept which makes it such a powerful idea in the study of diaspora." (Stock 2010:28) Understanding the complexities behind formulating an idea of home is one step into understanding the complexity of humans themselves, and how difficult it can be for the displaced subject to make sense of belonging.

In *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The God of Small Things* home is represented on different levels. It has a physical material sense of the location of the house, the town where the action in the plot takes place, the landscape or natural environment and the family. The concept of home also has a symbolic representation in both novels. It is through the body, love, nostalgia, memory, language and spaces such as the History House that the symbolic is

represented. There is also a feeling of homelessness and *un*belonging represented through the experience of displacement felt in different characters for different reasons.

Roy was an architect, so she has detailed descriptions of the houses, as well as other spaces and places in the narrative. She attributes almost human characteristics to the spaces, as in the example below:

> It was a grand old house, the Ayemenem House, but aloof-looking. As though it had little to do with the people that lived in it. Like an old man with rheumy eyes watching children play, seeing only transience in their shrill elation and their whole hearted commitment to life.
>
> The steep, tiled roof had grown dark and mossy with age and rain. The triangular wooden frames fitted into the gables were intricately carved, the light that slanted through them and fell in patterns on the floor was full of secrets. Wolves. Flowers. Iguanas. Changing shape as the sun moved through the sky. Dying punctually, at dusk.
>
> The doors had not two, but four shutters of panelled teak so that in the old days, ladies could keep the bottom half closed, lean their elbows on the ledge and bargain with visiting vendors without betraying themselves below the waist. Technically, they could buy carpets, or bangles, with their breasts covered and their bottoms bare. Technically.
>
> Nine steep steps led from the driveway up to the front verandah. The elevation gave it the dignity of a stage and everything that happened there took on the aura and significance of performance. It overlooked Baby Kochamma's ornamental garden, the gravel driveway looped around it, sloping down towards the bottom of the slight hill that the house stood on.
>
> It was a deep verandah, cool even at midday, when the sun was at its scorching best.
>
> When the red cement floor was laid, the egg white from nearly nine hundred eggs went into it. It took a high polish. (Roy 1997:165-166)

The house undergoes many transformations along the years adapting to technological changes, and allowing the decay and degradation of other aspects such as the ornamental garden, the Paradise Pickles and Preserves factory and Pappachi's moth collection, "in Pappachi's study, mounted butterflies and moths had disintegrated into small heaps of iridescent dust that powdered the bottom of their glass display cases, leaving the pins that had impaled them naked. Cruel. The room was rank with fungus and disuse." (Roy 1997:155). Desai on the other hand does not focus so much on descriptions of the house itself, except for the kitchen where Sai and the Cook spend a lot of their time, but tends to connect the idea of

home to the experience of the land, and nature, the mountains, the river, the whole environment surrounding the house and how characters related to it.

Diasporic narratives, just as postcolonial literature which depicts diasporic or displaced characters, in their exposure of feelings and experiences of migrant communities and individuals are fundamental as a 'science' of everyday life and an empirical account of the social reality of diaspora. Through the narrative, characters whether fictional creations, or as representations of real subjects, tell their stories. Biju experiences the harsh effects of living in the United States. Unable to assimilate into the new society despite going onto his second year there, he feels unwanted, discriminated against and unable to find a decent job or place to live. But he also realizes that this displacement and *un*belonging is not only common among poor working Indians, but also among others of South Asian origin, as well as Mexican, Jamaican, Nigerian and so many other nationalities. "There was a whole world in the basement kitchens of New York, but Biju was ill-equipped for it (…)" (Desai 2006:22) the reader is told.

Even young Indian students, living in houses or apartments seemed to be unwelcome, though denying it. When Biju is sent to deliver food to three Indian girls he notes,

> One day the Indian girls hoped to be gentry, but right now, despite being unwelcome in the neighbourhood, they were in the student stage of vehemently siding with the poor people who wished them gone.
>
> The girl who answered the buzzer smiled, shiny teeth, shiny eyes through shiny glasses. She took the bag and went to collect the money. It was suffused with Indian femininity in there, abundant amounts of sweetly washed hair, gold strung Kolhapuri slippers lying about. Heavy-weight accounting books sat on the table along with a chunk Ganesh brought all the way from home despite its weight, for interior decoration plus luck in money and exams. (…)
>
> They had a self-righteousness common to many Indian women of the English-speaking upper-educated, went out to mimosa brunches, ate their Dadi's roti with adept fingers, donned a sari or smacked on elastic shorts for aerobics, could say "*Namaste*, Kusum Auntie, *aayiye*, *baethiye*, *khayiye*!" as easily as "Shit!" They took to short hair quickly, were eager for Western style romance, and happy for a traditional ceremony with lots of jewelry (…) (Desai 2006:50)

This passage from Desai's novel is quite revealing of how Indians in the United States find themselves in a liminal stage. It is also valuable in documenting how Indians in the process of adapting are viewed by another Indian. Again, fiction gives the narrative the creative voice that enables an anthropological discourse to be told through the perspective of the character.

Characters' experience and perspective also allow the reader access to little symbolic and cultural details. Indian cultural traits such the smell of hair oil, or a representation of a deity for good luck, are symbols of home and are essential in the construction of belonging. These details are rendered through character experience. Cultural forms and expressions no matter how small or abstract, or hybrid in form help to maintain the ties to a cultural background, to preserve the roots which the diasporic subject requires when feeling displaced. The experience of the home in a foreign setting also creates the collective, and provides a sense of community. Biju experiences joy and pride in his country's cinema through the sharing of cultural interaction with Saeed Saeed, a Tanzanian of Indian ancestry with whom he sings and dances to Indian Bollywood songs. He realizes while in New York that as diasporic subjects, emerging from a postcolonial nation, having 'unanchored' themselves, they now belong nowhere and in the new society search for meaning and belonging. "The shadow class was condemned to movement. The men left for other jobs, town, got deported, returned home, changed names. Sometimes someone came popping around a corner again, or on the subway, then they vanished again. Addresses, phone numbers did not hold." (Desai 2006: 102).

Uprooted from the homeland, from family, and displaced in the hostland, the migrant working class in the United States, as represented through the character of Biju, belong nowhere. This feeling of *un*belonging creates a feeling of emptiness and sadness within him, and all he wishes for is to return home. At a certain point in the story, he is lying in his bed, dreaming of his childhood, his grandmother's village and a nostalgia sweeps over him as he realizes where he belongs. He belongs in an imaginary reconstruction of what was a pleasant, warm memory of his past home.

Estha and Rahel both return to the Ayemenem house after twenty three years also in a search for the place where they once felt was home. Being twins, their connection is to each

other and it is through their incestuous involvement that they reconnect to each other as one recreating a sense of home and belonging to each other, to the past, to the memories they share and to the trauma they also share and which defines them, together and as individuals.

Indians, like other immigrant communities, when abroad also tend to reject their roots so as to better be assimilated into the host culture. Biju asks whether if a cow that is not Indian should be considered holy. Along the same lines, one may ask whether Indians are still expected to preserve their nationality and culture once borders have been crossed. And what makes them Indian as generations pass, and people adapt to a new culture.

> "You know, Biju," she said laughing, "isn't it ironic, nobody eats beef in India and just look at it – it's the shape of a big T-bone."
>
> But here there were Indians eating beef. Indian bankers. Chomp chomp. He fixed them with a concentrated look of meaning as he cleared the plates. They saw it. They knew. He knew. They knew he knew. They pretended they didn't know he knew. They looked away. He took on a sneering look. But they could afford not to notice.
>
> "I'll have the steak," they said with practiced nonchalance, with an ease like a signature that's a thoughtless scribble that you know has been practiced page after page. (Desai 2006: 135)

As argued by Peggy Levitt (2010), in the diaspora different processes are at work. It is possible to adapt to a new life in a new place by rejecting the culture of origin, occupying a new body and new identity such as in the case of the bankers mentioned above. This can cause a feeling of emptiness and loss due to the lack of roots, which is common in the postmodern condition. It is also possible to allow for a new sense of belonging to take over not letting of memory for the homeland. Or it is possible still to occupy a space where we know we do not belong, and just be there and belong somewhere else.

> There is, however, a difference between ways of being and ways of belonging in a social field (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). *Ways of being* refers to the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in rather than to the identities associated with those actions. Individuals can be embedded in a social field but not identify with any label or cultural politics associated with that field. (…) Because these individuals have some connection to a *way of belonging*, through memory, nostalgia, cultural competency or imagination, they also belong to this social field and express their membership through their actions. (Levitt 2010:41)

There is an inner conflict that characterizes all diasporic subjects, and those who develop hybrid identities or are undergoing processes of liminality, leaving their native cultural roots behind, or the cultural traits of their ancestors. These are sometimes looked at with some suspicion or as being disloyal to their culture, nation and roots by other fellow immigrant subjects. Biju is someone who cannot adapt, and the more he changes job and meets new people and is confronted with Indians who are rejecting their Indian origins, the stronger he connects to his roots:

> One should never give up one's religion, the principles of one's parents and their parents before them. No, no matter what.
>
> You had to live according to something. You had to find your dignity. The meat charred on the grill, the blood beaded on the surface, and then the blood also began to bubble and boil.
>
> Those who could see a difference between a holy cow and an unholy cow would win.
>
> Those who couldn't see it would lose. (Desai 2006:136)

In belonging there is a need to identify with others in the diaspora. One can identify with people who are not necessarily of the same ethnic origin, or even of the same cultural and geographic region of the world. In the case of Biju, though being Indian, he cannot make sense, nor identity with the Indian businessmen at the restaurant. He does, however, identify with Saeed Saeed who Muslim living in the United States still refuses to eat 'pig', holding onto his identity – religious, cultural and national: "*First* I am Muslim, then I am Zanzibari, *then I will* BE American" (Desai 2006:136). The next time he finds himself faced with a prospective new job, he refuses to stay because they cook beef there, remaining true to his Indian cultural heritage and laws. How we identify with each other also involves some form of creativity and imagination to overcome differences and find points of common reference. This struggle with identity and identification is in itself the construction of a narrative.

In multicultural societies, such as New York, difference, whether cultural, social, sexual, political or ethnic, is a visible and present reality. In some societies, there is still a strong attempt to homogenize difference, and resistance leads to social exclusion and 'ghettofication'. The aftermath of 9/11, security measures and islamophobia have been blown

out of proportion and have resulted in a return to 'Orientalism' through a different perspective. A vague and vast area of the world that spans from North Africa to South East Asia and has at its core the Middle Eastern countries is feared and every immigrant subject fitting the cultural, religious, national, ethnic or political stereotyped profile according to which this area is defined is considered a possible terrorist. There is a danger in this reasoning which can lead to inequalities, violence and conflict. In *The Inheritance of Loss* all immigrants and immigrant groups in the United States regardless of nationality or religion are looked at, and treated as the same. Diversity and cultural complexities are ignored. In *The God of Small Things,* though Roy includes fewer reflections on diaspora in her narrative, she does criticize the houses built on gulf money of returned immigrants, and describes Rahel's experience of displacement as she moves from place to place before returning home to Kerala. What Roy does is focus on and denounce the social and religious inequalities caused by the caste system, which also lead to violence.

Diaspora and immigration are directly linked to the emergence of multicultural societies. The preservation of a cultural identity and roots in the diaspora involves the negotiation of an idealized notion of difference. So difference, like culture is in itself a mutable and adaptable reality. What constitutes difference, how this difference is expressed and how this difference is used in the construction of cultural identity is subject to transformations and adjustments as a result of both external and internal factors over time. This is also true in the homeland as well as in the diaspora, as both ends, national and transnational, are affected by the social, political and economic changes that all societies are experiencing in this multicultural, globalized and increasingly unstable world. Furthermore, the interconnected nature of the world today as a result of globalization and technology means that information reaches anywhere immediately, so cultural expressions and forms in the diaspora will affect the homeland, just as the reverse is also true. There is therefore also a factor of psychological tension and conflict in the process of constructing a cultural identity in the diaspora which is further heightened by the speed and immediacy at which everything happens.

Another destabilizing aspect of the diaspora is the effect of the imaginary in the construction of ideals. Distance, though not an issue today in terms of communication and in

the access to information, is still an obstacle in the perception and complete understanding of the realities that characterize both sides of the cultural coin – the diaspora and the homeland. The immigrant's experience may be misrepresented in the homeland and among family members for many different reasons, just as the idea of what has been left behind will also be closer to a fictional reconstruction than to the real state of affairs. In *The Inheritance of Loss* the cook not only fantasizes about life in America, and his son's life in America, but also reinvents his son's experience when talking about him to Sai, the judge or other locals, as this passage portrays:

> But although Biju's letters traced a string of jobs, they said more or less the same thing each time except for the name of the establishment he was working for. His repetition provided a coziness, and the cook's repetition of his son's repetition double-knit the coziness. "Excellent job," he told his acquaintances, "better even than the last." He imagined sofa TV bank account. Eventually Biju would make enough and the cook would retire. He would receive a daughter-in-law to serve him food, crick-crack his toes, grandchildren to swat like flies.
>
> Time might have died in the house that sat on the mountain ledge, its lines grown indistinct with moss, its roof loaded with ferns, but with each letter, the cook trundled toward the future.
>
> He wrote back carefully so his son would not think badly of his less educated father: (…) (Desai 2006: 17-18)

It is the connection to the land, to roots, to the culture of one's ancestors that binds scattered people together according to a common origin in a new context. On the other hand, it is the illusion of a new coherence that leads people to the diaspora, and to progress. The experience of both states results in hybrid identities. In the diaspora, liminal modes of cultural expressions are the result of transitions and symbiosis of a nostalgia for the homeland and a desire for a new social reality. The collective experience of this leads to a regathering of subjects in a new context through the production of a common identity. This diasporic identity becomes a form of resistance, a way of coming to terms with a lost, misrepresented and denied claim of the past.

> As Kanishka Goonewardena points out in a challenging essay, post-colonial critics, by and large, have subscribed to the theoretical orthodoxy of diasporas as affirmative countercultures marked both by haunting

memories of displacement and by the capacity to convert these memories into self-enabling forms of resistance to current globalizing norms (Goonewardena 2004: 659-60; see also Ashcroft et al. 1998). This view of diaspora is in line, as Goonewardena suggests, with post-colonialism's self-consciously utopian social tendencies, its self-given mission both to trace histories of colonial exploitation and oppression and to gesture towards a more equitable future in which today's conspicuously uneven social relations may be productively transformed. (Huggan 2010: 57)

The experience and reality of diaspora, therefore gives way to the emergence of new cultural and social forms[70] which come to be considered and accepted as authentic. It is through these expressions that a particular group of people, and even a nation come to be known and defined. Examples of these cultural expressions would be new musical forms, new artistic expressions, cooking, fashion, celebrations, etc., as well as the literature written in English. Through transnationality, globalization and hybridity, therefore, in ancient cultures such as India, or cultures without a formal history, such as in African or Caribbean nations, or Australia, indigenous or native people are able to re-appropriate their histories, re-write their past, and reclaim a cultural status and an identity through an alternative narrative.

Adapting to new socio-cultural, economic and political realities resulting in hybrid cultures and identities is a fundamental process for the migrant subject and the communities they form in the diaspora. Hybridity defines cultural identity in the above mentioned sense, but it is also a vehicle through which historical processes, colonization, decolonization and postcolonialism may be re-worked and re-interpreted like in the overcoming of traumatic events through the verbalizing of the experience of the colonized subject. Hybridity not only produces meaningful (re)interpretations of culture, it also provides meaning and structure to those who feel displaced or have been exiled (for whatever reason) from their homelands and distanced from their culture. This may not be a peaceful process at all circumstances and can easily lead to the emergence of negative cultural, racial, religious or national stereotypes and discrimination, but it is fundamental in understanding cultural systems, changes and the effects of postcolonialism. It is also a way of cultures making themselves seen and heard, and

[70] As I have analysed in Chapter 2 when discussing the English language and its changes, and the rise of Indian English.

of being recognized and acknowledged within a broader concept of culture and the world today.

> Not all diasporas entail open acceptance of diversity and willingness to engage with others. To be sure, many diasporas often include hardened identities, reified cultures and reactionary nationalisms (Vertovec 2006). Yet the modes and expressions of inter-cultural engagement evident among many members of diasporas certainly have much to teach us all, both in terms of social scientific understanding of the way culture works and in terms of practical living-with-difference. (Vertovec 2010: 68)

Throughout this discussion, I have been trying to show how fiction, as a category of narrative discourse, works as a representation and reconstruction of collective experience through the personal and subjective, in this way contributing to a more complete construction of historical processes and the anthropology of a nation such as India. Fiction, in particular postcolonial fiction written by authors of indigenous connection to the homeland and who have experienced the socio-economic, political and cultural changes that affected their nation and history, provides an insider look at people and practices, just as ethnographies aimed to do. It is through the adding of subjective and creative perspectives on everyday life, behaviours, interaction and events that the reconstruction, rewriting and understanding of a national history is more fully conceived. Social, historical and cultural practices as scientific processes that define humans, nations, and civilizations are therefore in essence embedded within fiction and narrativity. In the words of Michel de Certeau,

> In many works, narrativity insinuates itself into scientific discourse as its general denomination (its title), as one of its parts ("case" studies, "life stories," or stories of groups, etc.) or as its counterpoint (quoted fragments, interviews, "sayings," etc.). Narrativity haunts such discourse. Shouldn't we recognize its *scientific* legitimacy by assuming that instead of being a remainder that cannot be, or has not yet been, eliminated from discourse, narrativity has a necessary function in it, and that *a theory of narration is indissociable from a theory of practices, as its condition as well as its production?* (1994:78 de Certeau)

Just as folk tales in the past served to illustrate morals and to justify difficult historical events that had no proof, such as those recounted in the *Old Testament*, contemporary fictional narratives dealing with postcolonial, migrant or diasporic identities help in the understanding

and interpretation of cultural, political and social movements and transformations occurring in the world today through a literary perspective.

Subjective processes at work in the production of fictional narratives or, as I have called them, fictional ethnographies are a fundamental denominator of human development. An individual, a nation or the cultural state the world finds itself in today has arrived at such a point because we are shaped by our individual and grander histories. A writer will, therefore, retell the world according to a subjective interpretation based on lived experience and inherited values. This fact, though not alone, will be a responsible influence in the outcome of the story and the narrative. It is the writer's experience that shapes the narrative and it is the characters' experience brought to life by the author that give the story its perspective and meaning. These characters, however, are the living protagonists in their narrative worlds. And these worlds are also shaped by the representation of landscapes, natural and social structures, spaces and places, interaction, language, concepts of time and historical truth, memories and suffering and many other (fictional) realities. But all these geographies of identity formation have undergone fictional reconstruction as a result of the imaginary. Diaspora is no longer simply characterized as a longing for home, a nostalgia for a lost homeland, but it is the complex interworking of many internal as well as external tensions brought on by the socio-cultural, political, economic and technological effects of globalization and transnationalism.

The idea of the nation, national history, and cultural or ethnic purity is no longer as straightforward as it might have originally been for social theorists. It is in fact a network, a web of factors and identity traits which simultaneously distance and connect the diasporic subject from and to the homeland.

This highlights one of the dilemmas which the new concept of diaspora has thrown up. The powerful attraction of diaspora for post-colonial theorists was that, as transnational social formations, diasporas challenged the hegemony and boundedness of the nation-state and, indeed, of any pure imaginaries of nationhood (Gilroy 1993a; Clifford 1994; Hall 1990). The creative work of diasporic intellectuals on the margins is celebrated for transgressing hegemonic constructions of national homogeneity (Bhabha 1994). The more recent scholarly riposte to this view has highlighted the continued imbrication of diasporas in nationalist rhetoric, and critiqued the celebration of rootlessness as ahistorical and apolitical (Fabricant 1998). Again, the new postmodern interpretation challenged simplistic paradigms of diasporas as scattered communities yearning for a lost homeland, whether real or imaginary (Hall 1990; Boyarin and Boyarin 1993; Ghosh 1998). The growing

consensus is, by contrast, that such imagined attachments to a place of origin and/or collective historical trauma are still powerfully implicated in the late modern organization of diasporas. Diasporas, it seems, are both ethnic-parochial *and* cosmopolitan. The challenge remains, however, to disclose how the tension between these two tendencies is played out in actual situations. Transnational loyalties, like struggles for citizenship, are never finally settled. They are the stuff of debate in the diasporic public sphere. (Werbner 2010: 74)

With the complexity in defining and contextualizing diaspora and diasporic identity, a space or new spatial reality for the staging of diaspora emerges through the fictional narrative. Diaspora, as analysed by many theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Anderson, as well as Rushdie, is not only defined according to the scattering and gathering, or re-location of people from a particular nation to another. It is, on the one hand, the idea of a 'complex diaspora' (Pnina Werbner) where people from a particular region of the world, despite linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural differences are grouped together, such as South Asian diaspora. How these differences are overcome and fused together in the construction of a diasporic identity, is also a diasporic process. But on the other hand, diasporas are also, not only the space for physical dislocation and re-location, or the translocating of the homeland to the hostland, but an imaginary space essential in the formation of an identity, regardless of how authentic it may be when compared to the original culture.

In fictional ethnographies, national allegories, or postcolonial narratives both facts and fiction interplay. The author, the characters, the fictional content and context and the narrative are all agents in the complex task of (re)constructing the homeland in the postcolonial context of contemporary societies in a globalized world.

Understanding Indian culture through fiction

Returning now to the beginning of this discussion on the relation between anthropology and fiction, the writer, artist or ethnographer chooses the particular angle or perspective they are portraying, highlighting whatever aspects they wish, with intentionality, or not. If a photograph for example is subject to interpretation and the exact layout, dimension and perspective of the image is selected according to the photographer's intention, view or

perspective, it is a frozen image, a moment captured which tells a story; writing with the absence of visual aids will be much more subject to interpretation. Fiction has a powerful effect on the imaginary and imagination of the reader as we are also made to reconstruct the world that is being represented through the narrative. The reader will put his/her subjective cognitive processes at work in the understanding of the text. But the text, through its content and context has already been pre-selected by the writer, just as the ethnographer chooses how to portray a particular cultural practice.

Through fiction, therefore, writers are revealing as much about themselves, as about what they are portraying and in doing so, literature and life become inseparable in the process of reconstructing cultural realities. Furthermore, readers too, as receivers of the information in the text are responsible for the ideology behind the constructions they make out of the narrative, the culture or social group it stands for and the meanings which are attributed to the text at any given moment in time. Texts, therefore become liveable spaces, metaphorical realities where cultural practices are exchanged through narrative processes. These texts are not fixed spaces, they are mutable and changeable, undergoing constant transformations according to how cultures, diasporas, nations and individuals are understood throughout time.

Roy and Desai have constructed and structured their narratives so as to simultaneously induce and deconstruct the idea of the Indian cultural 'stereotype' and to challenge a pre-established form of understanding Indian society and history. The challenge is achieved by approaching a cultural study of India through fiction. There are other aspects of society and socio-cultural systems which also change as a result of colonialism and decolonization, such as the female condition and the inequalities created by the caste system.

The female condition is represented in both narratives. In *The God of Small Things* in every generation, women are the victims of a patriarchal society and family structure, where they are not given much of a choice in the decisions they make for their lives. However, all the women portrayed in the novels in each generation: Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, Ammu and Rahel, all of them break rules, cross borders of what is acceptable and expected behaviour of women in Indian society, and in that particular family. In doing so, however, they become the victims of their own choices, bound to the world and society they tried to escape from, and are made to succumb to their fate as a result of their actions.

Mammachi starts her own pickles and preserves business which grows to become quite successful and Pappachi "greatly resented the attention his wife was suddenly getting." (Roy 1997:47) He had always beaten her, but once retired and jealous of her success with the pickle business, he now began to beat her more frequently.

> At Pappachi's funeral, Mammachi cried and her contact lenses slid around her eyes. Ammu told the twins that Mammachi was crying more because she was used to him than because she loved him. She was used to having him slouching around the pickle factory, and was used to being beaten from time to time. Ammu said that human beings were creatures of habit, and it was amazing the kind of things they could get used to. You only had to look around you, Ammu said, to see that beatings with brass vases were the least of them. (Roy 1997:50)

Though she seeks out a professional activity for herself through the pickle factory, she never really manages to escape her fate as an Indian woman in a male dominated conservative society. She herself remains faithful to the social and cultural structures she is familiar with in Indian society, accepting the laws, such as in the raising of her children and the treatment of servants, as the untouchable caste, which I will go on to discuss next.

The female character of the same generation in *The Inheritance of Loss* was "a dark and ugly daughter of a rich man (…)" (Desai 2006:89) Desai describes the wedding ceremony in the Indian tradition:

> The wedding party lasted a week and was so opulent that nobody in Piphit could doubt but the family lived a life awash in ghee and gold, so when Bomanbhai bent over with a *namaste* and begged his guests to eat and drink, they knew his modesty was false – and of the best kind, therefore. The bride was a polished light-reflected hillock of jewels, barely able to walk under the gem and metal weight she carried. The dowry included cash, gold, emeralds from Venezuela, rubies from Burma, uncut *kundun* diamonds, a watch on a watch chain, lengths of woolen cloth for her new husband to make into suits in which to travel to England, and in a crisp envelope, a ticket for passage on the SS *Strathnaver* from Bombay to Liverpool.
>
> When she married, her name was changed into the one chosen by Jemubhai's family, and in a few hours, Bela became Nimi Patel. (Desai 2006:91)

This passage from the novel is very close to a passage from an ethnography describing a ritual from an outsider perspective observing the scene. Though being fiction emphasis is placed on the humour or irony to mock the ritual, and empathizing with the characters, something an ethnographer would not traditionally do in his/her writing because of the need for objectivity, and also because of his/her 'outsider' status.

The passage goes on to describe the consummation of the wedding on the part of the young bride and groom:

> Jemubhai, made brave by alcohol and the thought of his ticket, attempted to pull off his wife's sari, as much gold as silk, as she sat on the edge of the bed, just as his younger uncles had advised him, smacking him on the back.
>
> He was almost surprised to discover a face beneath the gilded lump. It was strung with baubles, but even they could not entirely disguise the fourteen-year-old crying in terror: "Save me," she wept.
>
> He himself was immediately terrified, frightened by her fright. The spell of arrogance broken, he retreated to his meek self. "Don't cry," he said in a panic, trying to undo the damage. "Listen, I'm not looking, I'm not even looking at you." He returned the heavy fabric to her, bundled it back over her head, but she continued to sob. (Desai 2006:91)

Night after night, she is unable to engage in sexual intercourse with her newly wedded husband, and he becomes a source of mockery, and embarrassment, especially among the men in his family. Once again, through fiction, the reader is led not only into the cultural practice, as would happen in an ethnography, but also into the private sphere of the bride and groom, of Nimi and Jemu, individual subjects, characters in the story, but also a representation of an Indian young man and woman performing and experiencing the Indian wedding ritual. The story skips a generation, as Sai's mother, Jemu's daughter dies, but Noni, a spinster who lives with her sister and is also Sai's tutor, tells her: "Time should move," Noni had told her. "Don't go in for a life where time doesn't pass, the way I did. That is the single biggest bit of advice I can give you." (Desai 2006:93). In other words, don't subject yourself to the female condition as an Indian woman.

Roy's main social denunciation is of the caste system and the violence it causes. She contrasts the house, the lifestyle and the rights of untouchable characters, Velutha, Vellya

Paapen, his father and his brother Kuttappen to the Ipe family of high caste Syrian Christians. The novel's tragic events to which all characters and the family history is tied revolves around a forbidden relationship, one of transgression of social, religious and love laws between Ammu, an upper caste female and Velutha, an untouchable. Roy describes the laws regarding untouchables in this extensive excerpt:

> As a young boy, Velutha would come with Vellya Paapen to the back entrance of the Ayemenem House to deliver the coconuts they had plucked from the trees in the compound. Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan footprint. In Mammachi's time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those they addressed. (Roy 1997: 73-74)

And she continues to describe the history of the so-called Rice Christians, as well as Velutha's story and experience who despite his social condition, had responsibilities and functions in the Ipe home which other Paravan were denied. But he was nonetheless an untouchable and not even his brilliance in carpentry, his way with Estha and Rahel, and his love for Ammu, all performed in secret saved him from his fate as a Paravan who transgressed the laws in that society built on ancient inequalities.

The cook in *The Inheritance of Loss* has a somewhat different function. It is not clear what his caste status is, though he is a servant, but the fact that he has no name emphasizes his social and individual irrelevance in the story. We discover through the narrative that his relationship with Sai, which has nothing sexual to it, is also looked down on by the grandfather as also by the two Anglophile spinsters, Noni and Lola. There is also constant reference to the fact that he doesn not speak English, since most of the parts of the novel which are in Hindi are part of his speech.

Mutt, the dog in the story, has more importance than the cook. When the dog disappears, the judge is furious and lets out his anger on the cook. This scene shows how inequalities are expressed at both levels for the cook felt he deserved a beating,

> "If I have been disobedient," he slurred, approaching the foot of the judge's bed with unfocused eyes, "beat me."
>
> "What?" said the judge, sitting up in bed and switching on the light, drunk himself. He on whiskey.
>
> "What?"
>
> "I'm a bad man," cried the cook, "I'm a bad man, beat me, sahib, punish me."
>
> How dare he ----
>
> How dare he lose Mutt how dare he not find her how dare he presume to come and disturb the judge -
>
> "*WHAT ARE YOU SAYING????!!!"* the judge yelled.
>
> "Sahib, beat me ----
>
> (…)
>
> "Yes," said the cook, "that is right. It's your duty to discipline me. It's as it should be."
>
> (Desai 2006:319-320)

In a similar way Vellya Paapen felt anger and humiliation at Velutha's involvement with Ammu and would have killed his own son had Mammachi wanted him to.

> When the terror took hold of him, Vellya Paapen went to Mammachi. He stared straight ahead with his mortgaged eye. He wept with his own one. One cheek glistened with tears. The other stayed dry. He shook his own head from side to side to side till Mammachi ordered him to stop. He trembled his own body like a man with malaria. Mammachi ordered him to stop it but he couldn't, because you can't order fear around. Not even a Paravan's. Vellya Paapen told Mammachi what he had seen. He asked God's forgiveness for having spawned a monster. He offered to kill his son with his own bare hands. To destroy what he had created. (Roy 1997:68)

The value of such narrative is that the social inequalities, the violence and the incoherence of the hierarchies that result from the historical construction of difference and discrimination is depicted through individual characters' experience. The reader is able to understand structures, events, practices and interactions through the fear, the pain, the

suffering, and the humiliation or through other emotional and cognitive processes that the characters as representations of social realities live.

In both novels there are also political, religious and economic aspects which are relevant in support of my argument, since they help to structure the idea of India and its historical transformations. Roy, as a social and political activist for India and a strong critic of Western economic interests in India, depicts the effects of globalization, excessive marketing and exploitation of the nation, land and people through her novel as well. These aspects are further emphasized when compared with the portrayal of a nation still strongly marked and defined through differences among its people. These social, class, caste, economic, political, religious and ethnic differences are depicted, and in a sense denounced, in both novels.

In *The God of Small Things* Rahel moves to Boston with her husband, and then, alone, to New York and Washington until she decides to return to Ayemenem after hearing of her twin brother's return. From her experience of exile in America, Rahel brings back noise and "Western progress"

> It had been quiet in Estha's head until Rahel came. But with her she had brought the sound of passing trains, and the light and shade that falls on you if you have a window seat. The world, locked out for years, suddenly flooded in, and now Estha couldn't hear himself for the noise. Trains. Traffic. Music. The Stock Market. A dam had burst and savage waters swept everything up in a swirling. Comets, violins, parades, loneliness, clouds, beards, bigots, lists, flags, earthquakes, despair were all swept up in a scrambled swirling. (Roy 1997: 15)

Once again, the English language, Western traditions and colonial heritage frequently referred to in the novels are as now integral aspects of Indian contemporary culture. The presence of Western culture, media and technology in India has been increasingly working its way into the culture and society and changing its form. The Ipe family in *The God Small Things*, an aristocratic family, spoke English and Baby Kochamma would punish the twins for speaking in Malayalam as children, making them pay a fine and write lines as punishment, for they were, as Chacko, their Oxford educated uncle had explained, *Anglophile*. *The Sound of Music*, Rudyard Kipling, *The Tempest, A Tale of Two Cities* (though these last two, not in

their original versions, but an adaptation and a comic version) Popeye, are all references to a colonial past. Soft drinks: Coca-Cola, Fanta, Rosemilk, and TV shows as a result of the dish antenna Baby Kochamma had installed in the house now being able to watch: Phil Donahue,

> Blondes, wars, famines, football, sex, music, coups d'état – they all arrived on the same train. They unpacked together. They stayed at the same hotel. And in Ayemenem where once the loudest sound had been a musical bus horn, now whole wars, famines, picturesque massacres and Bill Clinton could be summoned up like servants. And so while her ornamental garden wilted and died, Baby Kochamma followed American NBA league games, one day cricket and all the Grand Slam tennis tournaments. On weekdays she watched *The Bold and The Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*, where brittle blondes with lipstick and hairstyles rigid with spray seduced androids and defended their sexual empires. (Roy 1997:27)

The cook, Kochu Maria also enjoyed the benefits of globalization and technology, watching wrestling through the satellite dish antenna.

Globalization has an effect on social, cultural, natural and urban spaces. These spaces are a fundamental factor of cultural identification and the changes they undergo are directly linked to the transformations in cultural identity. Spaces, whether natural: rivers or mountains, or urban: houses, streets, places of leisure and interaction, are referred to in both the novels of Roy and Desai, as I have previously mentioned. It is in, around and through these spaces that meanings are formed, and transformed. Natural spaces are always present though they may be destroyed or changed overtime because of economic or political interests.

Natural spaces or geographic features such as landscapes, mountains or rivers give meaning to characters' lives, experience and identity because, on the one hand, they may represent fixed, unchanging factors and characteristics of a nation and therefore identity, and on the other hand, because of these natural spaces, lives may be separated, destroyed, shadowed or changed. Urban spaces are more subjective and malleable, constantly undergoing change, at a faster pace because of the effects of technology, social movement, globalization and political influences, not to mention the effects of war and other forms of conflict.

The role of space and spaces, location, territory, borders, and landscapes as represented in the narratives are essential to the definition of character identity and in the

portrayal of nations and their cultural geographies. In these two specific postcolonial narratives, space and spaces are represented as metaphors of cultural identity. The permanence or absence of spaces, the meanings they gain over time and as a result of historical processes, affect and are created by characters in a story who are themselves metaphors, representations of cultural realities. All factors at work in the construction of identity and in the defining of a national, cultural and personal narrative, are embedded in cultural and local meanings which make sense and are manifested through language and how it is used in the exposure of cultural metaphors and personal experience.

Landscapes and spaces may be experienced as physical presences, providing a background scenario, setting or context for actions, interactions and practices; and as geographical metaphors for an understanding or interpretation of the unfolding of events. These landscapes may represent different realities at different times. But spaces and landscapes may also be experienced through memory, not only for those in the diaspora, who experience the absence and the emptiness caused by distance from the homeland, as I have discussed earlier, but also by those at home as they witness the changes occurring in their land and cultural landscapes. Places, locations and landscapes contain history and symbolize change, hold memories and shape cultural heritage, but are also subject to change not only in form, but in meanings over time. Spaces and landscapes are cultural, geographical and national references acting on the shaping of identities, but are also shaped by human intervention. Whether natural, urban, social, cultural or even an absence, spaces as socio-cultural and political metaphors of the conflict between preservation and change are represented in the postcolonial narrative. Within, surrounding and through these spaces difference, conflict, trauma and history are enacted.

Furthermore, spaces have different meanings for different people, depending on the perspective. In the case of colonialism, for example, the land will have one meaning for the occupiers, and a different meaning for those native to the land. David Harvey makes an interesting claim when he argues that,

> Neither time nor space, the physicists now broadly propose, had existence (let alone meaning) before matter; the objective qualities of physical time – space cannot be understood, therefore, independently of the qualities of material processes. It is, however, by no means necessary to subordinate all objective conceptions

of time and space to this particular physical conception, since it, also, is a construct that rests upon a particular version of the constitution of matter and the origin of the universe. The history of the concepts of time, space, and time – space in physics has, in fact, been marked by strong epistemological breaks and reconstructions. The conclusion we should draw is simply that neither time nor space can be assigned objective meanings independently of material processes, and that is only through investigation of the latter that we can properly ground our concepts of the former. (Harvey 1997: 204)

Spaces are meaningless entities prior to being possessed both materially and culturally through human intervention. Any meaning that existed was a natural innate meaning associated to the land. Sacred, social, cultural, political, national meanings are of human creation developed through different practices and interactions with these spaces, which are in effect, fundamental in the construction of all dimensions of human life. And because human practices change and evolve the meanings attributed to these spaces also changes and so on in an ongoing transformative relationship. In the same way, new meanings can be attributed to spaces that are no longer essential in human daily practices, like a monument, a temple, or even some natural feature of a land such as a river or mountain. And this is because of the changes that societies, nations and cultures undergo as a result of historical, social, political and technological development.

New meanings can be found for older materializations of space and time. We appropriate ancient spaces in very modern ways, treat time and history as something to create rather than to accept. The same concept of, say, 'community' (as a social entity created in space through time) can disguise radical differences in meaning because the processes of community production themselves diverge remarkably according to group capacities and interests. Yet the treatment of communities as if they are comparable (by, say, a planning agency) has material implications to which the social practices of people who live in them have to respond. (Harvey 1997:205)

In both novels, the notion of spaces and communities changing over time and acquiring new meanings is a persistent theme. The Ayemenem House in *TGST,* the Paradise Pickles & Preserves, the river and The History House are all metaphors of change as society and nations evolve economically and politically over the decades, and as a result of decolonization and globalization. The river had once been visible from the house, but it was

so no longer because of changes Mammachi had made to the veranda. This suggests how generations, and the perceptions they have of cultural life are also altered over time. But the greatest change of all lay beyond the river in the History House:

> the house on the other side of the river, in the middle of the abandoned rubber state where they had never been. Kari Saipu's house. Who spoke Malayalam and wore mundus. Ayemenem's own Kurtz. Ayemenem his private Heart of Darkness. He had shot himself through the head ten years ago when his young lover's parents had taken the boy away from him and sent him to school. After the suicide, the property had become the subject of extensive litigation between Kari Saipu's cook and his secretary. The house had lain empty for years. Very few people had seen it. But the twins could picture it.
>
> The History House.
>
> With cool stone floors and dim walls and billowing ship shaped shadows. Plump, translucent lizards lived behind old pictures, and waxy, crumbling ancestors with tough toe-nails and breath that smelled of yellow maps gossiped in sibilant, papery whispers. (Roy 1997:52-53)

When Estha and Rahel returned to Ayemenem years later, everything in the town had changed. The river was now smaller, with a saltwater barrage in the interest of farmers, plenty of weeds, the stone steps for bathers and fishermen to access the river "were entirely exposed and led from nowhere to nowhere, like an absurd corbelled monument that commemorated nothing." (Roy 1997: 125) and polluted. And the History House had been converted into a five-star hotel and was no longer accessible from the river.

> The hotel guests were ferried across backwaters, straight from Cochin. They arrived by speedboat, opening up a V of foam on the water, leaving behind a rainbow film of gasoline.
>
> The view from the hotel was beautiful, but here too the water was think and toxic. *No swimming* signs had been put up in stylish calligraphy. They had built a tall wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching on Kari Saipu's estate. There wasn't much they could do about the smell.
>
> But they had a swimming pool for swimming. And fresh tandoori pomfret and crêpe suzette on their menu. The trees were still green, the sky still blue, which counted for something. So they went ahead and plugged their smelly paradise – 'God's Own Country' they called it in their brochures – because they knew, those clever Hotel People, that smelliness, like other people's poverty, was merely a matter of getting used to. A question of discipline. Of Rigour and Air-conditioning. Nothing more. (Roy 1997:125-126)

And Roy goes on to elaborately describe the changes the hotel chain had made to the land, the History House, and to the 'ancestral home of Comrade E.M.S Namboodiripad, Kerala's Mao Tse-tung's house' (Roy 1997: 126) now the hotel dining room for tanned tourists, being served by former local communists dressed up in ethnic costumes. So not only does Roy describe the changes that have occurred in Kerala as it evolved into a tourist destination, but also the artificiality of the representation of local culture for these tourists, through symbols of Indian culture: coconut water served in a shell, kathakali performances and the fusion of local and international food. Colonialism revisited in its globalized, postmodern form.

The town of Ayemenem had also changed. It now had more houses, "freshly baked, iced, Gulf-money houses built by nurses, masons, wire-benders and bank clerks who worked hard and unhappily in faraway places." (Roy 1997:13) These new houses contrasted with the older, poorer houses. The land was being used for mass scale rice farming and smelled of pesticides.

In the *The Inheritance of Loss* the changes represented in the narrative are more of a political and cultural conflict of the defining of borders and the appropriation of land. Differences and changes in cultural manifestations are also raised as an issue that created conflict between Sai, and her math tutor, Gyan, an Indian-Nepalese who is seduced into the Ghorka insurgency of the Indian Nepalis. The geographical region where the action in the novel takes place is in the north of India close to the border with Nepal, where a group of Indian-Nepalese had demanded an independent state since the Independence of India in 1947. The novel traces the Indian Nepali insurgency of the late 80s with the Ghorka National Liberation Front leading the uprising movement in those years.

What is brought to light in this theme of the narrative are the differences between two young people, Sai and Gyan, who fall in love and out of love because of how they connect to their nation, culture, land and history. They both begin to question the appropriation of land and historical truth. A visit to the Darjeeling museum where Tenzing Norgay's socks and other tools he took with him, when he and Edmund Hilary became the first men to reach the top of mountain Everest, were on display, makes them consider the question of who has a

right to claim ownership or conquest over land: those indigenous to the land, those who first set foot on the land, or no one at all?

"He was the real hero, Tenzing," Gyan had said. "Hillary couldn't have made it without Sherpas carrying his bags." Everyone around had agreed. Tenzing was certainly first, or else he was made to wait with the bags so Hilary could take the first step on behalf of that colonial enterprise of sticking your flag on what was not yours.

Sai had wondered, Should humans conquer the mountain or should they wish for the mountain to possess them? Sherpas went up and down, ten times, fifteen times in some cases, without glory, without claim of ownership, and there were those who said it was sacred and shouldn't be sullied at all. (Desai 2006:155)

It is Sai's return to India that makes her rethink her identity, and her hybridity. It is Gyan's realization of his own ethnicity that awakens him to the Ghorka movement and to his power to shape his personal, ethnic and national history. As he observes the protestors and insurgents of the GNLF shouting along the streets, thoughts and feelings go through his head and trouble him, who he has been growing up to be, and who he feels, in his own national identity, he should be in the world today.

As he floated through the market, Gyan had a feeling of history being wrought, its wheels churning under him, for the men were behaving as if they were being featured in a documentary of war, and Gyan could not help but look on the scene already from the angle of nostalgia, the position of a revolutionary. But then he was pulled out of the feeling, by the ancient and usual scene, the worried shopkeepers watching from their monsoon-stained grottos. The he shouted along with the crowd, and the very mingling of his voice with largeness and lustiness seemed to create a relevancy, an affirmation he'd never felt before, and he was pulled back into the making of history.

Then, looking at the hills, he fell out of the experience again. How can the ordinary be changed?

Were these men entirely committed to the importance of the procession or was there a disconnected quality to what they did? Were they taking their cues from old protest stories or from the hope of telling a new story? Did their hearts rise and fall to something true? Once they shouted, marched, was the feeling authentic? Did they see themselves from a perspective beyond this movement, these unleashed Bruce Lee fans in their American T-shirts made-in-China-coming-in-via-Kathmandu? (Desai 2006:157)

Although he senses artificiality in the protestor's nationalism, the frustration and anger in their motivation, and the desperation in their need to reclaim historical truth and authority over their national rights over a land and identity, the weight of his heritage draws him to the movement and the cause, turning him against Sai for being 'impure' as an Indian in a broader sense, regardless of specific ethnic differences and interests within India. As he listens to the speeches about the Indian-Nepali's interests and rights within their country, since independence in 1947, he begins to make sense of himself and the events in his life. He also realizes the truth in the lack of authority over their own land. The language learnt in schools is not Nepali, the Indian Nepalis are not given the rights they feel they should have in their district, whether in applying for jobs, or ownership of the land, or even in the preservation of their culture. And "he [Gyan] finally submitted to the compelling pull of history and found his pulse leaping to something that felt entirely authentic." (Desai 2006:160) It was through defending his ethnic origins, identity and ethnicity that he would be able to create meaning for himself, his family, his community, his past, and his future. He begins to resent Western influence on Indian culture and India's inability to resist these foreign impositions and therefore succumbing to forgetting its cultural roots:

> "I am not interested in Christmas!" he shouted. "Why do you celebrate Christmas? You're Hindus and you don't celebrate Id or Guru Nanak's birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New Year."
>
> She considered it: Why? She always had. Not because of the convent, her hatred of it was so deep, but…
>
> "You are slaves, that's what you are, running after the West, embarrassing yourself. It's because of people like you we never get anywhere." (Desai 2006:163)

But Sai challenges him, stating that today, people have a choice to go in whatever direction they want. Decolonization provided them with this choice.

> Stung by his unexpected venom, "No," she said, "that's not it."
>
> "Then what?"
>
> "If I want to celebrate Christmas, I will, and if I don't want to celebrate Diwali then I won't. Nothing wrong in a bit of fun and Christmas is an Indian holiday as much as any other."

This tagged on to make him feel antisecular and anti-Ghandian. (Desai 2006:163)

Colonialism and the socio-historical processes which followed, decolonization, migration, capitalism and globalization, crushed the notion of cultural permanence and unchangeability of time and space as a factor of national identity. At the aftermath of decolonization with all the social, economic and political changes the world experienced as a whole, all systems gained a temporality and a sense of changeability. Focus shifted to "the process of *becoming*, rather than *being* in space and place." (Harvey 1997: 205) Just as identity, and how it is manifested, began to take new shapes, in an ongoing flow of cultural change which in turn becomes how a nation and culture are perceived at any given time, and place. So Sai, an Indian girl brought up in a nun's boarding school in Russia, the Judge, an anglophile who studied at Cambridge and despised his *Indianness*, Biju, the son of the cook who is sent to the United States where he struggles to find a decent life for himself, or Gyan, an Indian-Nepali who cannot find a good, well paid job in his own homeland and whose anger and frustration lead him into the Ghorka national movement, are all of them Indian postcolonial subjects struggling with their own claims to identity as Indians experiencing an inner conflict brought on by complex national, and as a consequence individual, processes and experiences.

The shifting of socio-cultural processes that define identity may be understood through the metaphor of the border: the crossing of borders and the blurring of borderlines. The crossing of borders is a constant theme in much contemporary, and postcolonial literature as this literature deals with issues not only of literally defining, eliminating and crossing borders because of migration and the geographical implications of political and economic changes the world undergoes. But also the notion, once again, of liminality. Borders understood as what shapes and defines cultural and individual identity, or the limits and codes one has to live by because of society and its laws – written and unwritten.

Characters in a story move in and out of spaces, which define who they are, according to a given social, cultural, economic and/or political setting, and also redesign the borderlines that shape them in a metaphorical sense. The crossing of borders, or even the eliminating of borders can cause some discomfort in characters who already feel displaced by history and

political change, such as the effect of colonialism and decolonization. The changes individuals and communities experience and assimilate as part of their being are fundamental in the process of recreating identity in contemporary society, and in the postcolonial subject. In *The God of Small Things*,

> Chacko told the twins that though he hated to admit it, they were all anglophiles. They were a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away.
>
> (…)
>
> Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows will never be sad enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives never important enough. To matter (Roy 1997: 52-53)

And as he proceeds to describe The History House with its books, its smells, its ancestors, and the whispering inside, he then concludes by saying,

> 'But we can't go in,' Chacko explained, 'because we've been locked out. And when we look in through the windows. All we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures our dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves. (Roy 1997: 53)

The post-colonial narrative challenges the apparent fixity of the space once occupied by history by creatively re-interpreting and re-defining their meaning according to new perspectives. The history house must be broken into for an understanding of the past, and its processes as a key to the present and future. History and the unfolding of events can be re-written at any time, and in any form, be it on the body, as trauma, such as the experience of the twins, and Ammu, through changes in landscape and in the meanings geographical features acquire or through narrative, such as the novel, which provides a new reading into the events.

Time leaves its mark on spaces as it affects all other factors of existence. If we consider time as an invisible, untraceable force visible through its effect and power on space and on individuals, places, or nature, then its relation to socio-cultural change becomes inseparable from the understanding of any movement in life, be it daily practices, or the passing of a lifetime, or even the unfolding of historical circumstance. It is also inseparable from fiction as a fundamental feature of the narrative in representation of life itself. According to Henri Lefebvre,

> In nature, time is apprehended within space – in the very heart of space: the hour of the day, the season, the elevation of the sun above the horizon, the position of the moon and stars in the heavens, the cold and the heat, the age of each natural being and son. Time was thus inscribed in space, and natural space was merely the lyrical and tragic script of natural time. (Lefebvre 2000: 95)

In the narratives I am discussing, time and the natural sequence of events are both allowed to jump back and forth in the reordering and recreating of a meaningful sequence. The socio-cultural, political and psychological conflicts that families, characters, nations and practices undergo are defined and redefined in and through the effect of time and how it changes spaces, including the narrative as space. These tensions are lived according to how perceptions shift as societies also undergo changes with the passing of time. From a theoretical perspective, time itself is also viewed and understood differently as societies evolve. For one, the notion of distance has become dissolved in time because of advances in technology, and the idea of permanence also seems to be fading. Everything has acquired a new temporality and impermanence which characterizes most cultural and social aspects of contemporary society. Furthermore, the notions of past and present have also suffered transformations. Although the past remains unchanged, it is now subject to constant reinterpretation, and new forms of the past keep emerging, adding information and perspective to an increasingly diverse construction of history and science. So does the past really remain unchanged?

The Hegelian logic of history remains an accurate discourse in that societies and the individuals that compose them follow a rational and scientific route towards self-realization and becoming. Development in individuals and societies, as in nations and civilization are

inevitable processes that everything in nature experiences on the path to freedom and enlightenment. Other writers, philosophers and theorists have also put forward and followed through Hegel's ideas of history through the understanding of spatial and temporal logic.

Economic and political forces of development release subjects whether individuals, communities or nations from repressive and fixed states, opening up new possibilities for change. Quoting some passages from Harvey:

> Foucault's emphasis upon imprisonment within spaces of social control has more than a little literal (as opposed to metaphorical) relevance to the way modern social life is organized. The entrapment of impoverished populations in inner city spaces is a theme that has, for example, long captured the attention of urban geographers. But Foucault's exclusive concentration on the spaces of repression (prisons, the 'panopticon,' hospitals, and other institutions of social control) weakens the generality of his argument. De Certeau provides an interesting corrective. He treats social spaces as more open to human creativity and action. Walking, he suggests, defines a 'space of enunciation.' Like Hägerstand, he begins his story at ground level, but in this case 'with footsteps' in the city. 'Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together,' and so create the city through daily activities and movements. "They are not localized; it is rather that they spatialize' (note how different the sentiment is from that conveyed in Hägerstand's work). The particular spaces of the city are created by myriad actions, all of which bear the stamp of human intent. Answering Foucault, de Certeau sees a daily substitution 'for the technological system of a coherent and totalizing space' by a 'pedestrian rhetoric' of trajectories that have 'a mythical structure' understood as 'a story jerry-built out of elements taken from common sayings, an allusive and fragmentary story whose gaps mesh with the social practices it symbolizes.' (Harvey 1997:213-214)

And Harvey continues his analysis:

> 'The goal,' he writes, 'is not to make clear how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology, but rather to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of "discipline"' The 'resurgence of "popular" practices within industrial and scientific modernity,' he writes, 'cannot be confined to the past, the countryside or primitive peoples' but 'exists at the heart of the contemporary economy.' Spaces can be more easily 'liberated' than Foucault imagines, precisely because social practices spatialize rather than becoming localized within some repressive grid of social control. (Harvey 1997:214)

Spaces, landscapes, bodies, nations, narratives become the sites for the production of meanings and through which transformations from former meanings regain form. In nations such as India which experienced colonialism and decolonization many transformations were imposed on the land, people and culture. All the social systems according to which Indian people were organized within their ethnic, linguistic and religious groups were shaken by Western presence and further shaken with the end of the colonial era. The course of history gained a new direction and meaning for this nation, though it wasn't an immediate, spontaneous nor straightforward process. A nation, its people, culture and structures are left in a state of dysfunction. And readjusting to a new sense of identity and how to perform in a postcolonial society brought about a new awareness, not only in postcolonial subjects, as in indigenous cultures and how these are expressed within a new socio-economic and political logic and discourse.

In a postcolonial context, culture and the spaces through which it is manifested come to be perceived and lived according to a transformation of local forms into new, more global ones. On the one hand, these changes are visible in all aspects of local culture within the homeland, from language, to traditions, to social interactions, to social, political and economic consciousness and awareness. On the other hand, the nation as an independent entity is reinserted into the world map as part of a global project according to the new logic of the postcolonial and a Western globalized logic. Though there is a tragic inevitability of Western domination and the dictating of rules in the unfolding of the colonial process, its era and aftermath, there is also a new possibility for expression for those who were once silenced, a re-appropriation of historical processes. A new vision of the world and its inhabitants as equal citizens is generated with difference perceived as a benefit and not a limitation.

In a post-colonial context the borders of belonging and what they symbolize within the homeland, and in how the homeland is perceived from the outside, gain new impetus. Individuals, as defining members of a particular cultural or national context move beyond borders migrating to other parts of the world, or remain within national borders but readjusting their existence according to new post-independence realities, logic and discourse, constantly evolving and permeating themselves into local practices and changing cultural forms as a result. The weight of a colonial past with all its oppressive traits remains imprinted on a

nation's identity through trauma, but also through new forms of expressing identity. The inevitability of national development and evolution provided access to a globalized world through which all nations, cultures, and people are connected in a new attempt at discovering equality through the acknowledgement and diffusion of difference.

Homi Bhabha's theory of dissemination may be again discussed here and taken further to the point of abstraction. Moving beyond the familiar, or stepping over borders which define social, cultural, and national limits, individuals find themselves in what he calls the 'unhomely'. When encountering the 'unhomely' individuals may feel displaced and enter the realm of the 'incomprehensible' and begin to question self-identity. But by inhabiting in the beyond, in "the poetics of exile" positive cultural transformations can occur. Culture should not be limited by borderlines because moving beyond is not necessarily the end of history, tradition, identity but can also be the beginning of new forms.

The narrative as related to space and time becomes a way of preserving ideas and perspectives of a particular historical moment, people or belief. In fact, as Harvey argues, writing captures the moment of social practice and represents the discourse of experience through the narrative, preserving it in time, "Any system of representation, in fact, is a spatialization of sorts which automatically freezes the flow of experience and in so doing distorts what it strives to represent." (Harvey 1997:206) Though it may distort experience and authenticity through the physical or metaphorical representation of a reality, it also gives it life and despite fixing something in time, eternalizing it through the representation, the narrative also sets the scene of change.

In architecture, in the visual arts and in music, change is more apparent and more easily represented, since the necessary tools for depicting changes are the very nature of the art being exposed. Installations in the visual arts, latest technology in film, electronics in music, futuristic architecture, etc., are all contemporary representations of change in the arts. In literature, however, form remains unchanged as the narrative will always be in written form and through the medium of a specific language. But there is the possibility of subverting form through the narrative by playing with language, style, linearity and even literary standards such as using capital letters, extra spacing, using words to represent shapes, or using colloquialisms. And of course, language itself is always in a process of change.

The crossing of borders whether stepping out from the familiar into the new, or the incoming of foreign or external influences leads to the rethinking and reshaping of forms, as well as to the mixing and creation of hybrid forms. Hybridity may be visible in language, in cultural practices, and in social systems and structures. The postcolonial narrative because of its form, its characters, and its depiction of events is a representation of this hybridity. The narrative, as space, "is a metaphor for a site or container of power which usually constrains but sometimes liberates processes of *Becoming*." (Harvey 1997:213) It is in this sense that the narratives through "Symbolic orderings of space and time provide a framework for experience through which we learn who or what we are in society." (Harvey 1997:214) As societies change and evolve, social and cultural practices are recreated according to the spatio-temporal logic and circumstances reappropriating meaning through a familiar discourse.

The God of Small Things and *The Inheritance of Loss* are novels through which it is possible to acquire knowledge of the social, cultural, historical, political, religious and linguistic aspects of Indian society and its transformations. These aspects are represented in the narrative through the natural and urban spaces, through the characters, through their generational differences and through the portrayal of different historical moments. The transformations each of these aspects goes through as a result of postcolonial realities and adapting to life in contemporary society is told through the experience of the "small things", like the individual characters, or spaces as entities and work as metaphors for grander processes and concepts. Transformations in society and cultures as a result of external influences, from colonialism to globalization causes a re-ordering of structures and meanings, though sometimes some aspects, characters or spaces get caught in a state of non-meaning or of a passing between meaningful states.

I discussed how aspects such as migration, diaspora, the displaced subject, landscapes, female roles, and the servants acquire meaning and perspectives through the narrative in the representation of these aspects as changing forms in Indian culture. In this sense, and initiating the reflection leading to a conclusion to the discussion this thesis has raised through its three chapters, fiction offers a way into culture, in the same way that history, anthropology or an ethnography do. Fiction however creates the narrative space where the reader is allowed to

delve deeper into experience through the character, by perceiving spaces, "listening in" on dialogues, reading characters' minds and even reliving memories.

As I began my argument in this chapter, the ties between ethnography and fiction are apparent, especially when dealing with postcolonial narratives. Postcolonial fiction through its portrayal of society, people and practices can be viewed as a complement to anthropology, and vice versa. Furthermore, fiction provides angles and gives insight into socio-cultural theory that traditional methods in ethnography cannot. Through reading and interpreting postcolonial narratives, we are led to a depiction of culture, practices, interactions and people that opens up new and multiple possibilities for understanding cultures and contemporary societies, their social characteristics and the unfolding of the historical processes that created them. In a concluding quote from *The Inheritance of Loss*, "Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this one narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it." (Desai 2006: 323).

Conclusion

> Modern allegory, Walter Benjamin (1977) tells us, is based on a sense of the world as transient and fragmentary. "History" is grasped as a process, not of inventive life, but of "irresistible decay." The material analogue of allegory is thus the "ruin" (178), an always-disappearing structure that invites imaginative reconstruction. Benjamin observes that "appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to redeem them for eternity, is one of the strongest impulses in allegory" (quoted by Wolin 1982 :71). My account of ethnographic pastoral suggests that this "impulse" is to be resisted, not by abandoning allegory – an impossible aim – but by opening ourselves to different histories. (Clifford 1986:119)

This thesis analyses, exposes and evokes the shifting of methodological and theoretical approaches and understanding of the processes related to the representation of history and culture through a more general approach and relating them specifically to India, the role of the narratives in cultural and historical reconstruction and of the actual concepts and theory associated with this type of interpretative reading. The transitions involved are due to a development of thought, as also to the changing socio-political and economic circumstances nations and the world have, and continue to experience. But they also reflect a development of my own ideas and methodologies.

However, the discussion in this thesis is also meant as a deconstructive effort challenging pre-conceived and apparently fixed concepts that have been used in the interpretation of cultures and narratives. Concepts such as 'history', 'postcolonial', 'authentic', 'objective' and 'ethnography' which initially appeared to have the necessary foundations and stability required for the proper formulation of an analytical process, lose their fixed qualities in a postcolonial and postmodern era. All these aspects have laid the foundations for my argument and have been interworked through the two novels, *The God of Small Things* (1997) and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) by Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, respectively, as case studies for my theoretical 'fieldwork', another academic practice which I approach through the these fictional narratives.

The following quote from James Clifford in his chapter "On Ethnographic Allegory" (1986), though extensive, is important to include here as it illustrates the theoretical,

philosophical and literary conceptualization of the articulation between narratives, culture and history I am aiming at:

> Allegory (Gr. *allos*, "other," and *agoreuein*, "to sepak") usually denotes a practice in which a narrative fiction continuously refers to another pattern of ideas or events. It is a representation that "interprets" itself. I am using the term allegory in the expanded sense reclaimed for it by recent critical discussions, notably those of Angus Fletcher (1964) and Paul de Man (1979). Any story has a propensity to generate another story in the mind of the reader (or hearer), to repeat and displace some prior story. To focus on ethnographic allegory in preference, say, to ethnographic "ideology" – although the political dimensions are always present (Jameson 1981) – draws attention to aspects of cultural description that have until recently been minimized. A recognition of allegory emphasizes the fact that realistic portraits, to the extent that they are "convincing" or "rich," are extended metaphors, patterns of associations that point to coherent (theoretical, esthetic, moral) additional meanings. Allegory (more strongly than "interpretation" calls to mind the poetic, traditional, cosmological nature of such writing processes.
>
> Allegory draws special attention to the narrative character of cultural representations, to the stories built into the representational process itself. It also breaks down the seamless quality of cultural description by adding a temporal aspect to the process of reading. One level of meaning will always generate other levels. (Clifford 1986:99-100)

What is implied in this excerpt is the conclusion I have reached at the end of this research project through the process of reading into the theory and the developing of my own views on the postcolonial fiction on India written by Indian authors in English. History, though made up of actual events that occurred in the past, when reconstructed becomes a story which can be broken down and further developed into many other stories. Like history, which tells us about the past, this is also true of ethnography which provides an account of the present. And in both cases, the reconstruction of events, past and present, is only possible through linguistic devices such as the narrative with its resort to specific figures of speech used for aesthetic purposes, but also serving an ideological function.

The narratives function as a palimpsest of ideas, where, as Clifford has explained stories generate other stories, while opening up the possibility for new meanings, new approaches to the data, new understandings of culture and new interpretations. The narrative and especially fiction when recognized as fundamental to this process, becomes *the* story

which renders history or culture real and accessible. “Allegory prompts us to say of any cultural description not “this represents, or symbolizes, that” but rather, “this is a (morally charged story about that.” (Clifford 1986:100).

To further this discussion along Clifford’s quote above, as a palimpsest, the construction of a cultural history acquires a “temporal aspect” because the interpretation of history is, as I have also argued, an ongoing process which shifts and changes according to the political, social and economic circumstances which produce it. Again, cultures do not hold still for the picture, just as interpretative processes do not fossilize and remain unchanged. And as the accumulation of narratives and stories surrounding a given historical and cultural setting becomes so rich, complex and diverse there cannot be one valid account over others, but only an acknowledging of different points of entry into the story. Historical and cultural understanding is a process which involves a never-ending evocation of past and present stories achieved through an ongoing dialogue between the narrative (author) and the reader (interpreter). Though the author is also an interpreter. It is through this process that the individual, the once considered native, the formerly colonized subject, the formerly silenced voices become agents of their own stories.

Fiction deconstructs “the post-Darwinian bourgeois experience of time – a linear, relentless progress leading nowhere certain and permitting no pause of cyclic return” (Clifford 1986:111). In imperial ideology the philosophical understanding of time was that of a universal movement towards an ideal of civilization. This belief was shattered with the wave of independence that swept through colonies in Africa, Asia and in parts of the Caribbean and altered the course of history as perceived in European politics, and the nature of historical writing. Decolonization, newly emergent historical narratives, as well as post-colonial fiction meant a return to the past, or a cyclical reading of events. This return to the past in an attempt at reclaiming history meant the deconstruction of history as a timeline of events and political deeds of the Europeans.

The God of Small Things and *The Inheritance of Loss* are examples of this cyclical return to the past. The non-linear style of the narratives through which events are depicted and the insistent return to specific moments through different perspectives makes these novels historical and cultural allegories, providing the reader with different approaches to the events.

Each time the narrative returns to a specific moment, the reader and the possibility for interpretation are also returned to that event. The narrative comes closer to the performance of a ritual as both characters and readers are involved in the evocation and reconstruction of meaning of any given moment, event or story.

In this process a culture, custom, history or tradition and the meanings to them attached do not disappear, but may be constantly returned to, re-evoked, re-interpreted, even if this is no longer done through first person observation but through the reading of another previous document (or narrative) or through the passing down of a story. What gains importance here is not so much the narration of the past as a faithful depiction of events, as authentic, or close to the original, because this is an impossible achievement, but the present, and how it is used as an entry into the past, or into a culture which only exists because it has a past, regardless of the transformations it has experienced. In this sense, it is the present, present interpretation and present representation (evocation) which are relevant in the understanding of history and culture. Once again leading to the conclusion that stories whether historical or cultural are fictions in the making. And the objectivity required for a formal analysis of specific circumstances is only available through subjective and creative construction.

How have I tried to make sense of the transitions involved in this process of historical and cultural narratives, and their relation with fiction? Political and philosophical ideas about India, the people and culture emerged in the 19th century with imperial expansion and the ideologies that then governed. Independence, and the adaptation to the social and political reality of decolonization resulted in the emergence and development of new ideologies. To the development of internal ideological and theoretical structures required for the construction of the nation were added the social, political, economic and technological changes that were shaping the world and which also affected the Indian nation and people. Culture and cultural expression, which included the arts and language were deeply affected by all these developments and changes. What the world began to witness was the opening of a space for a new cultural form emerging from India which defined not only national culture, but also how it had developed over time through this palimpsest approach.

In fictional narratives of the postcolonial 'genre', in particular those written in English (since the adoption of this language medium evokes the British presence) it is possible to revisit, in one way or another each of the moments in the making of India that are implied in the previous paragraph. The narrative, therefore, becomes a passageway into history, into culture, into people's experience depicted both collectively and individually, and into an understanding of the transformative processes involved in the formation of an identity – whether individual, social, cultural or national.

In a post- era (post-modern, post-colonial, post-structural) notions of culture, history, nationality and identity have lost the once apparently fixed structure as a result of the changes the world has experienced since the end of World War II, but especially since the 80's with the rise of technology, globalization and transnational mobility of people and cultures. These concepts have become fragmented pieces of what once made sense only as a coherent whole. Cultural forms were circumscribed within national borders, or within communities in the diaspora, and this was how cultures, nations and identities were defined and kept as authentic. An aspect which was valued according to ideals of cultural purity. This ideal collapsed. The spread of people and cultural forms across borders, the commercial impact and diffusion through electronic means resulted in the creation of a cultural product, a commodity for which a market opened. Through this demand a new structure, or rather, the endless possibility for new structures emerged from the fragments and rubble, giving new meaning to what seemed lost and irredeemable. And as the past becomes more distant, the values which it once stood for become accessible through the fragments. It is hard to be scientific in the standard empirical sense when dealing with fragments, regardless of the fact that I consider the piecing together of these fragments, stories, individual experiences as a way of composing a new approach or version of the truth.

As Stephen Tyler writes in his essay on post-modern ethnography in *Writing Culture*:

> Evocation – that is to say, "ethnography" – is the discourse of the post-modern world, for the world that made science, and that science made, has disappeared, and scientific thought is now an archaic mode of consciousness surviving for a while yet in degraded form without the ethnographic context that created and sustained it. Scientific thought succumbed because it violated the first law of culture, which says that "the more man controls anything, the more uncontrollable both become." In the totalizing rhetoric of its mythology, science

purported to be its own justification and sought to control and autonomize its discourse. Yet its only justification was proof, for which there could be no justification within its own discourse, and the more it controlled its discourse by subjecting it to the criterion of proof, the more uncontrollable its discourse became. Its own activity constantly fragmented the unity of knowledge it sought to project. The more it knew, the more there was to know. (Tyler 1986:122)

Empirical observation and the means through which this scientific knowledge was transmitted got caught in the creative process of story writing. And stories, from the process of writing, the shaping of the narrative, the content within it included, and the interaction with the reader gained a new and important meaning in the redefining of identity in a post- era. Within the fields of history, anthropology or cultural studies, we have moved from a representation of the 'other' as within a Western academic logic to the possibility for self-expression through an evocation of personal experience as a valuable and fundamental document in the understanding of a culture and cultural identity, with a past and present being continuously reconstituted. The idea of the past, with its alleged authentic, unchanging nature, has not been lost, it is simply reworked and understood as a tool in the structuring of identity through its location in the present context, even if in an imagined form. This goes back to the idea and theory on the homeland, the nation, or the reclaiming of history. These are all imagined realities, reconstructed realities, fictions which become the narratives that compose identity.

And indeed every imagined authenticity presupposes, and is produced by, a present circumstance of felt inauthenticity. But Williams's[71] treatment suggests that such progressions need not be consistently located in the past; or, what amounts to the same thing, that the "genuine" elements of cultural life need not be repetitiously encoded as fragile, threatened and transient. This sense of pervasive social fragmentation, of a constant disruption of "natural" relations, is characteristic of a subjectivity Williams loosely connects with city

[71] Clifford is referring to Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) where he "shows how a fundamental contrast between city and country aligns itself with other pervasive oppositions: civilized and primitive, West and "non-West", future and past. He analyses a complex, inventive, strongly patterned set of responses to social dislocation and change, stretching from classical antiquity to the present. Williams traces the constant reemergence of a conventionalized pattern of retrospection that laments the loss of a "good" country, a place where authentic social and natural contacts were once possible. He soon, however, notes an unsettling regression. For each time one finds a writer looking back to a happier place, to a lost, "organic" moment, one finds another writer of that earlier period lamenting a similar, previous disappearance. The ultimate referent is, of course, Eden (9-12)" (Clifford 1986: 113).

life and with romanticism. The self, cut loose from viable collective ties, is an identity in search of wholeness, having internalized loss and embarked on an endless search for authenticity. Wholeness by definition becomes a thing of the past (rural, primitive, childlike) accessible only as a fiction, grasped from a stance of incomplete involvement. (Clifford 1986:114)

It is this sense of 'incomplete involvement' that creates the more authentic conceptualization, or evocation, using Tyler's idea, of the whole. It is not that cultural traditions, forms and expressions and the authenticity attached to these have disappeared, faded in a globalized world to give way to postmodern narratives of displacement and inauthenticity, but it is precisely this feeling of cultural transformations, displacement and the loss of tradition that has brought and keeps bringing about the creation of new ethnographies where individual experience as a fundamental piece of national history and culture is evoked through fiction.

So returning to my initial thoughts on the deconstruction of concepts, fictional narratives or the theoretical shifts in anthropology, cultural studies and literature have also altered how ethnographies were conceived and perceived, as I discussed in the third chapter of this thesis. Traditional ethnographies, just as histories are documents of the past which have no place in a present or future global context. These ethnographies have to be adapted to changing social, cultural, economic and political realities in a globalized world. The 'primitive', the 'native', the 'indigenous', and the 'other' are no longer so, if they ever were, in human terms, and they are capable of now writing their own histories and ethnographies and of choosing the form through which these are expressed.

Pervasive assumptions about ethnography as writing would also have to be altered. For allegories of salvage are implied by the very practice of textualization that is generally assumed to be at the core of cultural description. Whatever else an ethnography does, it translates experience into text. There are various ways of effecting this translation, ways that have significant ethical and political consequence. One can "write up" the results of an individual experience of research. This may generate a realistic account of the unwritten experience of another group or person. One can present this textualization as the outcome of observation, of interpretation, of dialogue. One can feature multiple voices, or a single voice. One can portray the other as a stable, essential whole, or one can show it to be the product of a narrative of discovery, in specific historical circumstances. I

have discussed some of these choices elsewhere (1983a). What is irreducible, in all of them, is the assumption that ethnography brings experience and discourse into writing. (Clifford 1986:115)

This is what occurs in fiction. It is this creative liberty that brings ethnography, history and fiction closer together. The writer is able to present the information in whatever form he/she chooses to express it in. Furthermore, the writer, who is also the ethnographer may or may not be writing and reporting events from first-hand experience, depending on how distant spatially or temporally he/she is from the depicted reality or circumstances. In many cases, the narrative is a result of another kind of palimpsest: one of text written over, or derived from other texts. This is what Clifford is referring to as "textualization" in the quote above.

This procedure is similar to the passing down of stories through an oral tradition. Each time the story is told, new details may be added or left out. Emphasis may be placed on particular aspects of the story, or characters, just as different perspectives or tones may be applied. The difference is that in a written narrative, what has been recorded remains as such. But the possibility for interpretation is endless, as are subsequent narratives which may result thereon, using any text as a point of departure. Scholars too, and researchers are 'guilty' of this, as we construct our ideas on textualization. And on the multi-layering and patchwork of texts.

There has been a movement from the oral tradition to the written word, a progression from the primitive, native and indigenous into the modern and contemporary and a deliberate appropriation of a global language as opposed to the vernacular in the telling of stories and in the conception of the narrative. But both Roy and Desai make their texts audible through the narrative strategies used by playing with language and form, in this way incorporating some of the indigenous, the vernacular and the oral traditions. This plays with the idea of the "indigenous ethnographer" or the "re-Orientalist" as discussed in this thesis, and perhaps it evokes a return to an original form of expression.

So the value attributed to the narrative in the depiction of a culture, nation or people both from an anthropological or historical perspective becomes a matter of personal opinion and interpretation, subject to academic trends of recognition. In effect it is all just fiction at the mercy of theory and ideology though doubtlessly too, "important allegorical forms that express "cosmological" patterns of order and disorder, fables of personal gendered identity,

and politicized models of temporality" (Clifford 1986:119). And just as these forms have undergone so many transformations over the past decades, more changes and shifts in the practice will occur in the future. And what is considered valuable or authentic or relevant may soon become outdated or be the text through which another emerges. New spaces will open, as the world becomes increasingly globalized and homogenous on the one hand, while simultaneously cultures and the borderlines that define nationality and cultural identity will be further fragmented. Meaning, however, will continue to be extracted from whatever cultural form emerges out of these new spaces of cultural production. And the possibilities are endless. The more the focus is placed on the individual as an agent of cultural production, the more the narrative becomes a postmodern history or ethnography.

> The meanings of an ethnographic account are uncontrollable. Neither an author's intention, nor disciplinary training, nor the rules of genre can limit the readings of a text that will emerge with new historical, scientific, or political projects. But if ethnographies are susceptible to multiple interpretations, these are not at any given moment infinite, or merely "subjective" (in the pejorative sense). Reading is indeterminate only to the extent that history itself is open-ended. If there is a common resistance to the recognition of allegory, a fear that it leads to a nihilism of reading, this is not a realistic fear. It confuses contests for meaning with disorder. And often it reflects a wish to preserve an "objective" rhetoric, refusing to locate its on mode of production within inventive culture and historical change. (Clifford 1986:120)

The claim that cultures, cultural theory, cultural studies and cultural production have all evolved is feasible. But the direction they have taken is not necessarily towards the absolute truth the philosophers of the Enlightenment aimed for. Cultures, production and the associated theories have evolved according to the development and transformations the world, societies and socio-political and economic systems have also endured. The structures which defined history, culture and identity and which held these concepts together have been defied and challenged, and mutated to produce new forms. In fact, I would argue along the lines of Tyler and other postmodern theorists the aim today is precisely to look for meaning in the elimination of form, structure and rules. I would agree with Tyler in his discussion on postcolonial fiction today,

Defined neither by form nor by relation to an external object, it produces no idealizations of form and performance, no fictionalized realities or realities fictionalized. Its transcendence is not that of a meta-language – of a language superior by means of its greater perfection of form – nor that of a unity created by synthesis and sublation, nor of *praxis* and practical application. Transcendent then, neither by theory nor by practice, nor by their synthesis, it *describes* no knowledge and *produces* no action. It transcends instead by evoking what cannot be known discursively or performed perfectly, though all know it as if discursively and perform it as perfectly.

Evocation is neither presentation nor representation. It presents no objects and represents none, yet it makes available through absence what can be conceived but not presented. It is thus beyond truth and immune to the judgement of performance. It overcomes the separation of the sensible and the conceivable, of form and content, of self and other, of language and the world. (Tyler 1986:122)

Science, objectivity, and Western academic discourse survived for so many centuries and dominated the world and its historical development because of the economic, political and military power of Europe, but also because of the strong belief in its own ideals. The result however was that its structure was shattered, appropriated, transformed and new structures emerged. According to Tyler, "Instead of a coherent system of logic, science created a welter of local order unrelated to one another and beyond the control of anyone." (Tyler 1986: 124) Academic discourse opened to new realities, just as scientific theory and practice branched out to include more subjective fields as valuable referents in the body of universal knowledge since the incorruptibility of objectivity and Western rationale came into question in the fuller understanding of the world, its people and cultures. This was how postmodernism as a cutting edge theory for political, scientific and artistic concepts came into being.

Consequently, it [science] had to look outside its own discourse for justification, to seek legitimation in a discourse that was other than its own and not subject to its own rules. It needed a discourse that could not be part of the self-perfecting discourse of science or foundational in any scientifically acceptable way.

Science chose an uneasy compromise, subjugating itself both to the discourse of work (politics and industry) and the discourse of value (ethics and aesthetics), but since politics and industry controlled the means of play and could always threaten to withhold the funds on which the game depended, science succumbed more and more to limitations on play imposed in the interests of its masters (Tyler 1986: 125).

The postcolonial as subject, as narrative, as a cultural identity has moved beyond the theory that originally defined it and delineated its form and content in the period of post-colonialism. It has suffered, so to speak, the transformations defined by the economic markets, socio-political ideologies, cultural changes and artistic needs the world experiences. The postcolonial has detached itself from objectivity and linearity and has moved close to an abstraction. It is now closer to fiction as poetry than to prose, since it is composed of fragments and images, metaphors through which the self as connected to a common history, culture, homeland and identity is imagined and evoked. The past being irretrievable, recovering what is lost is achieved through the metaphorical realities and in this sense every new space opened is a possibility for a new history, a new idea culture, of nation, of identity, of India. But again, perhaps 'new' as I have previously referred is not the best way to conceive of this reality. It is a return in an attempt to recapture meanings in a different form, from a different perspective through the piecing together of the fragments scattered by others who performed this same procedure before.

The postcolonial narrative today, though the author is given the possibility to explore narrative strategies, style and content, does follow a formula generated by the socio-political and economic context of contemporary society. It is also written in a proto-language that through specific academic and interpretative processes produces and invokes new meanings to help in the ongoing understanding of the postcolonial theoretical reality. Roy's novel was written in the late '90s, Desai's already in the 21st century, but by now, postcolonial literature on India will have taken on a different form, style, and be dealing with other content matter altogether which will make sense today. However, it is still a return to the past in the light of the present. It continues to be a point of entry into an ethnography and a history of India. It is a ritualistic and aesthetic performance of an evocation of culture and identity. As Tyler so beautifully puts it, the postmodern ethnography, which as I have been arguing also includes the postcolonial narrative is a metaphor, poetry. And as such, it "defamiliarizes commonsense reality in a bracketed context of performance, evokes a fantasy whole abducted from fragments and then returns participants to the world of commonsense – transformed, renewed, and sacralised (Tyler 1986:125-26)."

The postcolonial narrative is an allegory, an evocation, a metaphor which allows for the uncovering and the interpretation of a nation, its history, culture and people. As in a poem, an idea is condensed and worked subjectively through language resulting in the metaphors that express the experience. The metaphor helps to trace history and culture either as first-hand experience, or through the intertextuality of experience, through the written document, through collective memory, or through the passing down of stories, or through imaginative and creative processes. Interests have shifted, as have ideologies, and today there is a concern with individual choice that though having always existed was not relevant in the imperial era as the abstract concepts of nation and a universal truth stood above everything else. But even in Western and many non-Western societies today, well into the 21st century where socio-cultural diversity holds no secrets, where individual freedom is encouraged, artistic and cultural expression is still in the hands of the political and economic systems. And the demand is always dependent on the markets which create the space for a particular form of expression. The postcolonial, some might argue, perhaps still fits within a modernist tradition of following a structure and scientific pattern in an attempt to reach an objective. But I would argue that it has, however, become scattered in its essence challenging institutionalized ideas and a general formula to which all must abide.

It is this challenge of form and authority, this reaction against a dominant discourse of established structures and finally the desire to provide a new perspective on a common day present and past reality, based on the individual experience of culture and history that result in narratives such as *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* as passageways into India, its people, culture and history. It is the vast and diverse universe of possibilities of making sense of a complex world that makes of these two texts, as of others of its kind, both works of art and valuable cultural and historical documents. Beneath the metaphors, the language, the imagery, the characters, the stories is a history and a culture waiting to be extracted and understood, an idea of India through a poetic evocation.

The poet Derek Walcott had already come to this conclusion as far back as the 1930s:

The Sea is History

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,

in that gray vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History.

First, there was the heaving oil,
heavy as chaos;
then, like a light at the end of a tunnel,

the lantern of a caravel,
and that was Genesis.
Then there were the packed cries,
the shit, the moaning:

Exodus.
Bone soldered by coral to bone,
mosaics
mantled by the benediction of the shark's shadow,

that was the Ark of the Covenant.
Then came from the plucked wires
of sunlight on the sea floor

the plangent harp of the Babylonian bondage,
as the white cowries clustered like manacles
on the drowned women,

and those were the ivory bracelets
of the Song of Solomon,
but the ocean kept turning blank pages

looking for History.
Then came the men with eyes heavy as anchors
who sank without tombs,

brigands who barbecued cattle,
leaving their charred ribs like palm leaves on the shore,
then the foaming, rabid maw

of the tidal wave swallowing Port Royal,
and that was Jonah,
but where is your Renaissance?

Sir, it is locked in them sea sands
out there past the reef's moiling shelf,
where the men-o'-war floated down;

strop on these goggles, I'll guide you there myself.
It's all subtle and submarine,
through colonnades of coral,

past the gothic windows of sea fans
to where the crusty grouper, onyx-eyed,
blinks, weighted by its jewels, like a bald queen;

and these groined caves with barnacles
pitted like stone

are our cathedrals,

and the furnace before the hurricanes:
Gomorrah. Bones ground by windmills
into marl and cornmeal,

and that was Lamentations -
that was just Lamentations,
it was not History;

then came, like scum on the river's drying lip,
the brown reeds of villages
mantling and congealing into towns,

and at evening, the midges' choirs,
and above them, the spires
lancing the side of God

as His son set, and that was the New Testament.

Then came the white sisters clapping
to the waves' progress,
and that was Emancipation -

jubilation, O jubilation -
vanishing swiftly
as the sea's lace dries in the sun,

but that was not History,
that was only faith,
and then each rock broke into its own nation;

then came the synod of flies,
then came the secretarial heron,
then came the bullfrog bellowing for a vote,

fireflies with bright ideas
and bats like jetting ambassadors
and the mantis, like khaki police,

and the furred caterpillars of judges
examining each case closely,
and then in the dark ears of ferns

and in the salt chuckle of rocks
with their sea pools, there was the sound
like a rumour without any echo

of History, really beginning.

Derek Walcott (1930)[72]

[72] Walcott, Derek (2007) *Selected Poems* Ed. Edward Baugh, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.

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